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JACK URQUHART'S DAUGHTER



PAMELA SWEY

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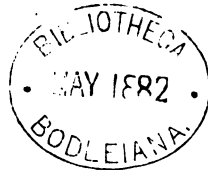
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# JACK URQUHART'S DAUGHTER.

A *Nobel*.

BY  
PAMELA SNEYD.

IN TWO VOLUMES.  
VOL. II.



LONDON:  
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,  
Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen.  
1882.

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# JACK URQUHART'S DAUGHTER.



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## CHAPTER XIII.

### IN THE TOILS.

‘The God of love,  
That sits above,  
And knows me, and knows me,  
How pitiful I deserve.’

**R**ALPH awoke the following morning to the calm that follows a storm. The sun was shining into his room, the birds were singing on the window-sill, and in the street below he could hear the merry voices of children at play.

‘What a heavenly day for going to see Ferrars at Freshwater!’ was his first thought; and it had scarcely shaped itself

before Oliver, who occupied the adjoining apartment, burst into the room.

‘Ralph, they are back!’

‘They! who?’

‘Why, my people, of course! I’ve just heard from my mother from town. They want me to join them there to-day, and to return with them to Marchmont to-morrow. I shall go, for I am very anxious to get this matter settled. There’s nothing like facing a bother.’

Ralph looked at him steadily :

‘Yes; always get a disagreeable over as soon as possible.’

*La nuit porte conseil*, and things have a knack of looking strangely different by daylight. All Ralph’s schemes for seeing how the land lay, and perhaps for talking over Lady Lavinia, had vanished, put to flight by the sunshine; had fled like night before the chariot of the dawn.

‘You are coming to Marchmont next week, aren’t you?’ asked Oliver, as they sat down to breakfast.

‘Yes, I hope so,’ replied Ralph. ‘Lady

Lavinia has been good enough to ask me ; I am to meet my mother there on Wednesday or Thursday, I believe.'

After that, nothing more was said about the engagement for the moment, and, indeed, very little more was said about anything ; for Oliver, as I have already stated, was not a brilliant conversationalist, and was moreover only genuinely interested in two topics—Marchmont and the City. Of course he had another subject of interest now to discuss, but he had a dawning feeling that there was not much help or consolation to be got out of Ralph, and, besides, he was disinclined to speak of Cosy this morning. His heart was heavy, and his tongue was weak.

'Let me make one suggestion to you, Oliver,' said Ralph, as they were rising from the breakfast-table. 'Don't ask too much from your parents at first. Don't put a pistol to their heads and compel them to say "Yes, or No ;" for in that case you may be sure that it will be "No." And remember, what they say, they stick

to. If you wish to gain your point, you must be diplomatic—you must temporise. And, bear this in mind, *if* your people refuse their consent, it is no good carrying on the game. Those hopeless, endless engagements are terrible things; bad for the man, cruel to the woman.'

To the latter part of his friend's advice Oliver turned a deaf ear. However, he promised to be diplomatic, and not to drive his parents into a corner; but even whilst he was promising, Ralph strongly doubted his ability to keep his word. Oliver would be Oliver, and Lady Lavinia would be Lady Lavinia, to the end of the chapter; which meant, in other words, that Oliver would be obstinate and uningratiating, and Lady Lavinia cool and hard. What John Oliver Marchmont might say or think was perfectly immaterial; for the old banker always had, in the long-run, to do what his wife wished or commanded. He was one of those men who are born to be slaves or despots, and he was the latter out of his own

house ; but at home he had to give in to the lady who had sworn to honour and obey him.

‘I want you to come up to Currall Cottage with me,’ said Oliver to Ralph, as they were leaving the coffee-room. ‘I must say good-bye to Cosy, and I am afraid of finding Urquhart in at this hour.’

‘Which means, I suppose, that if we do find him in, I am to talk to him!’ said Ralph, laughing. ‘All right, I don’t mind for once in a way ; but, as a rule, I do not talk to Captain Urquhart. But I don’t think we need fash ourselves about him. He doesn’t care for our society any more than we do for his.’

‘I am afraid he does care for my society,’ growled Oliver. ‘I wish he didn’t. I never know what to say to him. I hate talking to him.’

‘Not more than he hates talking to you,’ returned Ralph ; ‘you may be certain of that. I should say that he liked you as little as he likes me.’

To which speech Mr. Marchmont made no reply ; and nothing further was said respecting Captain Urquhart or his family until they reached their house. But more than once during that walk to the cottage did Ralph Dufferin find himself wondering what on earth Cosy and Oliver would find to talk about, when ' the chain that galls but cleaveth not ' had linked them together for life. Never, it appeared to him, would any two people have married each other with less prospect of finding a common topic of interest, or with fewer interests in common. What the one liked, the other disliked. Cosy hated England ; Oliver hated the Continent. What the one knew, the other did not know, and did not wish to know. Oliver's knowledge was derived solely from books ; Cosy's from intercourse with her fellow-creatures. Oliver liked the company of few ; Cosy the society of many. Oliver liked quiet, not to say monotony, and was without any capacity for enjoyment. Cosy lived upon excite-

ment, and when in health and spirits was apt to be noisier than it is permitted even to a very beautiful woman to be; and natures so dissimilar can only attract for a time, to fly off from each other at a tangent when they meet. Given the wear and tear of daily life, and the disillusionising power of marriage, and the ultimate separation of such couples is a foregone conclusion.

'Are Oliver and Cosy really in love with one another? how long will the glamour last? and if they marry, which will gain the ascendancy, and which will be the more miserable?' were questions that Ralph Dufferin asked himself more than once during the course of that walk, but to none of which was he able to give a satisfactory answer.

He felt somewhat perplexed this morning, and thoroughly uncomfortable. Only last evening had he told Cosy that her father's house was no home for her, and he had promised to see Lady Lavinia (he did not go through the form of including John

Oliver) and find out how the land lay. And when he had said this, he had been thoroughly convinced that he was acting kindly and wisely, and that a marriage with Oliver would be an excellent thing for Cosy, although very hard to bring about.

But now, upon reconsidering the matter, for, unlike Oliver, Ralph did reconsider questions of judgment, he began to doubt whether after all this marriage would be such a good thing for her, whether it might not indeed prove a very bad thing for her: for might it not be exchanging transient trouble for lifelong misery? he asked himself. Miss Urquhart's father was her misfortune, and a very heavy misfortune too; but her husband would clearly be her fault.

Ralph could not bring himself to believe that Cosy would ever be happy with Oliver. And then, he said to himself, would she be good? He had a very kindly feeling towards the girl; and he had never liked her so well as he had

done last evening, when she told him of her father's treatment of Lesoeur, and how indignant it had made her; but his opinion of her was not so high as to lead him to believe in her doing her duty by a husband with whom she was unhappy. And he dreaded her being very unhappy with Oliver. Oliver was a man who might make a woman so miserable; not from *malice prepense*, but from sheer obstinacy, and from ignorance, which has such a mighty power to wound.

'Ah well! they will just add one more to the many couples who have shipwrecked their own and each other's lives,' thought Ralph; and this conclusion brought him to the gates of Currall Cottage, on which Master Franky was swinging, whilst Hardie was making a mud fortification on the gravel path.

Ralph caught the elder child up in his arms and kissed him.

'Do you recollect me, Franky?'

'No.'

'By Jove, how like his mother he

grows!' exclaimed Ralph, turning to Oliver.

'Does he?' replied Oliver, coldly.

He was beginning to dislike any reference to Averil Urquhart. He felt that he should always be out of it when Ralph and Cosy talked of the dead woman whom they had both loved in different ways, and he was growing to hate these common topics of interest between his friend and his lady-love.

Ralph perfectly understood the meaning of that cold, constrained tone, and he said to himself that here would be another 'element of discord'—jealousy. It would be terrible indeed if Oliver were to develop that quality to any great extent, for Cosy would neither understand nor have patience with it; although it was quite possible that she might—wittingly or unwittingly—give cause for it.

'And where is sister, Franky?' asked Ralph, when the first greetings had been exchanged.

'She is out with papa. They've gone

to Sandown to see a lady, and they aren't coming home till the afternoon. Sally is to give us our dinner. We are to have minced mutton.'

'Minthed mutton!' cried Hardie, beginning to demolish his fortification by flinging pieces of brick at it—a proceeding that somewhat disconcerted Oliver, who happened to be standing immediately behind the earthworks.

'Then I shan't see her again,' he said, turning to Ralph. 'What a nuisance! but *you* will come up here this evening, won't you? and tell her exactly what has happened?'

'To-morrow evening I'll do so,' replied Ralph. 'I can't to-night, for I go over to Freshwater as soon as you are off, and I shall sleep there. But I'll make a point of seeing Cosy directly I return.' Then he turned to the boys. 'Good-bye, children; mind you are very good, and give sister no trouble. And here is a shilling apiece for you, to buy tops with. Come on, Oliver, or we shall be late.'

Oliver said good-bye to Frankey and Hardie, gave them each half-a-crown, and then hurried after Ralph, who was waiting for him in the road.

During their walk back to the hotel Oliver scarcely opened his lips, and Ralph, attributing his silence to its true cause—his bitter disappointment at having missed Cosy—pitied him from the depths of his heart.

Mr. Home might find food for mirth in the sight of 'bullet-headed Marchmont hit under the wing and crippled for flying;' but it was not in moments like these that Ralph Dufferin felt inclined to turn his young friend into ridicule. Oliver was suffering keenly, and Ralph, in whose nature pity was very strong, although it *did* take a too patronising turn, saw nothing ludicrous in sorrow. To him it always dignified; it consecrated; it made the sufferer sacred even when it could not make him interesting.

'Poor fellow! I feel for you,' he said to himself, as he shook hands cordially with

young Marchmont at parting. He was recalling at that moment his own early griefs—his own first love ; the sorrow he had experienced at being torn away from Sophia von Hugel Hahn, which had been quite as real at the time, and harder far to bear than any grief that his maturer years had had in store for him.

Throughout that afternoon, and during his stay at Freshwater, Ralph's thoughts were with Oliver rather than with Cosy : it was easier to sympathise with the former when absent from him, and with the latter when with her. Apart from Cosy you might criticise her, but the charm of her presence was irresistible—Mr. Dufferin was quite ready to admit that. But when away from both Oliver and Cosy he was inclined to pity Oliver the most. It was so much easier to pity and to like Oliver Marchmont when you were not with him, for then you remembered his good qualities—that he was upright, honourable, and sincere—and you were not reminded of his drawbacks—his dull gloomy looks, his

ungenial manner, and his rough uncouth ways.

With Cosy, as I have said before, it was just the contrary. Apart from her you criticised her. You said that no woman could afford to be so fearless, so reckless, so unconventional, that no amount of beauty made up for such crass ignorance. But when you were with her, her lovely face, and her fresh clear voice, and her sweet manner, completely subjugated you for the time. And all criticism has to be silent before the unanswerable logic of success.





## CHAPTER XIV.

IN ANSWER TO A PRAYER.

‘Grant us not the ill we blindly ask.’

KEBLE.

**M**ISS COSY was at home, Sally informed Ralph when he presented himself at Currall Cottage late the following afternoon, upon his return from Freshwater ; but she was in her room. Would Mr. Dufferin walk in and wait for her in the drawing-room ?

‘No, thank you ; I’ll wait in the garden,’ replied Ralph, with unpleasant recollections of the atmosphere of Jack Urquhart’s drawing-room. ‘Tell Miss Cosy I am in the summer-house.’

And then he sauntered down to the green sentry-box, and seating himself therein, he lit a cigarette, and began to make a sketch of the cottage, on the back of an envelope, to beguile the time. He had to wait nearly ten minutes before Cosy appeared; and when he did see her, the first thing that struck him was her ghastly pallor, and the unwonted brilliancy of her eyes, which quite alarmed him.

'I'm so sorry to have kept you waiting, Ralph,' she exclaimed, holding out her hand; 'but I was lying down. I have had such a bad headache all day, and I was trying to get to sleep to forget it all.'

'To forget what, dear? What is the matter?'

'Haven't you heard? I thought that Oliver would have written to you. His people have refused their consent. And Mr. Marchmont has sent papa such an effusion! It was not the letter of one gentleman to another. Was it not horrid of him?'

Ralph coughed, stroked his moustache, and said nothing. He could not exactly tell Cosy that Mr. Marchmont did not look upon her father as a gentleman, so he merely murmured something about being very sorry for her. Cosy was standing before him, and so pity for *her* was now uppermost.

‘Not,’ she continued, speaking very excitably, ‘that Mr. Marchmont’s refusal matters to me. I shall not break off my engagement to please him or his wife.’

‘But Oliver can’t marry you without their consent.’

‘Then they will have to give in.’

‘They are not made of very yielding material, I’m afraid.’

‘No more am I. I have promised Oliver to wait for him, and I shall keep my word.’

Then after a short silence, during which she had been tearing the sweetpeas from their stalks by handfuls, she turned suddenly to Ralph :

‘Why don’t you say something ? Don’t

you care what happens to me?' And then the hot colour rushed to her face—with anger, Ralph thought.

'Of course I do,' he replied quietly; 'how can you ask such foolish questions? And do not suppose, child, that I am not sorry for your disappointment. I am, only I am not surprised. I foresaw from the first what the Marchmonts' answer would be, and I should have warned you long ago had I known the state of your feelings.'

'Yes; but what am I to do now?' she cried, very excitedly, 'now that they have answered, and that their answer is "No." The other night you told me always to do what I considered right *whatever happened*, or whatever anyone might say. Now isn't it right to keep one's promise?'

'Under some circumstances.'

'And you told Oliver once,' she continued, '(for he told me so), that no man ought to submit to having his wife chosen for him, and yet *now* you wish us to abide by his horrid old parents' decision!'

Ralph did not remember ever having made such a speech to Oliver, but he supposed that he had, as Cosy said so ; and he smiled somewhat complacently at finding how these young people accepted him as an oracle. And Cosy seeing the smile misunderstood it.

‘ He thinks me a child still,’ she said to herself. ‘ He looks upon the whole affair as a mere flirtation. He considers, like Lord Girton, that no man can be serious about me. Why does he take the trouble to lecture me ? I wonder. He does not think me worth it, I’m sure. He only likes me for my mother’s sake.’ Then aloud :

‘ I suppose that Lady Lavinia thinks that she has disposed of the whole affair by making her husband write that insolent letter to papa. But she is mistaken. Oliver has written to ask me to remain true to him, and I have promised to do so. He has given his word to his father, that he will not attempt to marry me under any circumstances until I come of age. But

after that we shall not wait one hour. It is very foolish of Lady Lavinia to behave as she has done. It has only embittered me against her. A mother has always, sooner or later, to give way to a wife. She had better have done it at once with a good grace.'

Again Ralph smiled. This time it was at the absurdity of the idea of that obstinate, narrow-minded old woman, Lady Lavinia Marchmont, giving way to this fair, fragile, ignorant young girl; and again Cosy misunderstood his smile.

'He thinks the marriage out of the question,' she said to herself. 'I know that he does. In his heart of hearts he sides with Lady Lavinia. When I told him of all my troubles the other evening, he pitied me for the moment, because I am pretty, and because he was fond of mamma. But I know that he does not consider me to be Oliver Marchmont's equal; and I can't bear to be looked down upon by Ralph.'

That was where the barb rankled. That

was the thought that really pained. She could not endure the idea of Ralph Dufferin considering it an act of condescension on the part of *any* woman of his acquaintance to receive *her* as a daughter-in-law. If he had reproached her, quarrelled with her, sworn at her, as her papa did, she could have borne it cheerfully. But she could not bear that smile. It meant either patronising indifference, or a half-pitying contempt, she thought; and it drove her nearly mad. Oh, if she could but make him feel one tithe of the misery he was inflicting! Clenching her little hands in her rage and anguish, she cried out:

‘*I* am very fond of Oliver. Because *you* do not care for him—you know that you once called him a cub in a letter to me’ (Ralph had entirely forgotten the circumstance)—‘it is no reason that *I* should not like him.’

‘Certainly not, my dear,’ replied Ralph calmly, and feeling very much astonished at this sudden outburst.

‘Why this excitement?’ he wondered.

And all for Oliver, too! It was certainly somewhat amazing. But the smile that was just rising again to his lips faded in a sigh of disappointment. What extraordinary beings women are, he thought. If ever there had lived a girl concerning whom he had said to himself that she would be hard to win, and only to be won by some very exceptional man, it was Cosy Urquhart. And now she had fallen in love with Oliver Marchmont—a wealthy, commonplace young gentleman, with a narrow understanding, and a total lack of any quality that can charm or subdue.

‘Well, what one fears never does come to pass,’ he said to himself, as he stood there watching Cosy, and thinking how rarely lovely and how singularly attractive she was.

What he had always dreaded for her was a very different fate. He had feared that her beauty might prove a curse to herself and to others; that her recklessness, her ignorance, and her impatience of rule and restraint might lead her into

danger, and make shipwreck of her whole life; or that she might coldly and deliberately sell herself to some *vaurien* for money: but he had never dreamt of her wearing out youth and health and spirits waiting for such a man as Oliver Marchmont. That she should do so was incomprehensible to Ralph. He had heard it said that women can lead a dual existence—can dedicate half their day to pleasure, and the other half to bigotry—can turn from saint to sinner, and from sinner back again to saint, in the course of half an hour. Was this true? he asked himself. If so, it accounted for Cosy. Perhaps she dedicated one—a very unreal—portion of her life to her *futur*, whilst the other portion was given up to the existence that he, Ralph, had seen her lead and enjoy.

‘Cosy has one quality in common with her mother,’ he thought; ‘a power of self-deception where a love affair is concerned. She is shrewd enough about everything else. But like Averil, she will marry, with her eyes shut, a being of her own creation;

and she will awake to find her life a blank. Not a disreputable blank, as poor Averil's life was, but a dreary blank, which she will resent more angrily. Poor little goose!

He parted with his poor little goose very kindly, promising again to do all that lay in his power—since she wished it—to talk over Lady Lavinia; and he asked her, Cosy, in return, to write to him from time to time.

‘Don't let it be exactly two years before I hear from you,’ he said. ‘Treat me a little better than you did last time. Remember that a line to “The Traveller's” always finds me sooner or later. Even if I am abroad my letters are forwarded to me every week. So write occasionally, there's a good child; and be sure and write if there is ever anything that I can do for you.’

Cosy nodded. She could not trust herself to speak. And Ralph went on:

‘I am going to leave you my little bouquet that I brought from Freshwater. I picked it for you in Ferrars garden,

knowing how fond you are of such tokens.'

He unpinned the flowers from his coat as he spoke, and offered them to her.

'I hope you admire them. Here is the starry jasmine, "the sweetest flower for scent that blows;" and a Gloire de Dijon rosebud, "the rose that has beauty for her dower." Very suitable, I think, fair lady, eh?'

Cosy took the little bouquet, and tried to smile her thanks. If her life had depended on it, she could not have spoken at that moment. 'And now,' continued Ralph, 'you must give me some of *your* flowers, as a peace-offering at parting.'

At her feet a patch of purple and yellow pansies were growing. She stooped down and plucked a handful madly, recklessly, tearing up flower and leaf and root in her hot haste.

'Take them!' she cried impetuously, almost throwing them at Ralph; and then, without stopping to listen to his neatly turned expression of thanks, without a

word of farewell, she brushed past him and fled into the house, never pausing for a moment until she had gained the refuge of her own room, the windows of which overlooked the strip of blue water that in another half-hour Ralph would be crossing.

Then at length she gave way. Dashing his flowers to the ground, she trampled them under foot in her bitter misery and despair.

‘He gave me *these*, the very scent of which makes me sick and faint, in exchange for *my* pansies! *My* heartsease! Ah, my God, he *has* taken that! and it can never be mine again—*never*—NEVER! Oh, Ralph! why did you come back? You could stay away for so long, why did you return at last to make me wretched? I was tolerably happy as long as you were away, for I did not know how much I cared for you; and, in time, I might have got to like Oliver pretty well. But now——! Oh! God help me—God help me!’

She quite forgot in this, the hour of her

trial and anguish, how she had once hoped and longed, or, as she had said to Oliver, almost prayed, for Ralph's return. She forgot everything save her own exceeding bitterness and despair. She felt as if she had been smitten with a sudden incurable agony that she knew must last for life. Would every hour pass like this? would this grief and pain know no end?

'Why can't I die?' she cried. 'I don't want to live without Ralph. O God, let me die!'

Judge her gently, dear readers. Remember her early life, her bringing up. Resignation is the result of the highest spiritual training, the last lesson learnt in the school of religion or of philosophy. Time and experience may teach Cosy how to suffer, and make no sign. But she is young as yet—very young to learn what a curse a granted prayer may prove, and how bitter a thing it is to have the desire of your heart granted to you, only that you may wish that it had been withheld.





### BOOK III.

#### *MARCHMONT.*

‘Ma vie est sans bonheur, mon berceau fut sans  
jeux.’







## CHAPTER I.

### A DAUGHTER OF HETH.

‘If my son take a wife of the daughters of Heth  
. . . what good shall my life be unto me?’

**T**HE same fashionable gazette that announced Ralph Dufferin’s arrival at Ryde, also contained the news that Mr. and Lady Lavinia Marchmont had returned to their residence, No. 56, Hyde Park Gardens, from the Continent. It is not, as a rule, a happy moment to select for an introduction to strangers when they are tired out after a long journey ; but time and place made but little difference to Lady Lavinia,

who had no happy moments, and no becoming ones.

Let us pause for a moment with that group of lavender-girls and crossing-sweepers, and take a good look (as they are doing) at the banker and his wife, as they alight from the dark green brougham that had been duly despatched to the station to meet them.

Buffon has told us that 'the style is the man.' Are we then to judge Mr. and Lady Lavinia Marchmont by their style? Her ladyship's non-admirers—and they were many—were wont to say that she had no style at all; that she looked like a decayed governess—a broken-down lodging-house-keeper—a beggar—anything but a lady.

Let me try to describe her. She was tall and gaunt, without being slight. She had large hands and feet, a *coupe rosée* skin, light blue eyes, and thin lips that never smiled. Her expression would have been melancholy if you could have applied so interesting an epithet to anything

belonging to Lady Lavinia Marchmont ; but gloomy described it more accurately. She was not an actively ill-tempered woman, but she was never quite in a good humour ; never genial, never pleasant. The shadow of the *Rock* hung over the whole house, Ralph Dufferin used to say, in allusion to the dismal periodical, the views of which were adopted and advocated by the Marchmont family.

Summer and winter, morning and afternoon, in wet or fine weather, Lady Lavinia always appeared in the same attire—a black silk dress in the house, and a long tweed waterproof cloak when she went out. She never made any change for anything, or anybody ; and she wore the same satin bonnet, with the red rose in winter, and the eglantine in summer, whether she was going to tramp the Edgware Road at ten a.m., or to pay a visit of ceremony at four in the afternoon.

It was the eglantine season of which we are now speaking, and some common-look-

ing dog-roses peeped out of the satin folds that covered her ladyship's head as she entered the house, followed by her husband: a short, thick-set, whitehaired little man, in every line of whose fair florid face coldness and nervous irritability were plainly written.

Down in Mincing Lane, the clerks were all of opinion that young Marchmont was going to be his father over again when he grew older; which was a pity, they thought: for a second edition of John Oliver was not to be desired. He was not a nice man to serve. His assumption of superior goodness irritated everyone about him, more especially as they failed to discover that the treasures that he was constantly saying were laid up for him in heaven made him one whit the more disinterested on earth. He was certainly not a popular person; he was almost more disliked than his wife, who was voted by all who knew her to be the most selfish, obstinate, stupid woman ever born.

Lady Lavinia, like her son, troubled her

head about few matters ; but upon these few she had very fixed opinions, which she had come by—heaven knows how ! and from which she would not have swerved to save her life.

Why the Dufferins liked or kept up a friendship with such a person was a marvel and a mystery to everyone. It was for ‘auld lang syne,’ Mrs. Dufferin said. And perhaps, too, they were flattered by *her* liking *them* ; for they were the only people who differed from her to whom her ladyship was not actually boorish.

‘She is the rudest old woman in England,’ Lord Aubrey Littledale had once told Agnes Sheridan, who forthwith disliked Lady Lavinia cordially.

Fancy being rude to *him* ! How heartless ! how wicked ! Poor little Agnes had quivered with indignation at the thought of such an enormity. She now avoided Lady Lavinia as much as possible, and turned crimson at the sound of her name.

Between the Sheridans and the March-

monts there was a silent enmity, none the less real and deep-seated from the fact of their being distantly connected—'very distantly,' Agnes used invariably to add whenever the fact was mentioned.

Lady Margaret simply looked upon her very distant cousin Lavinia as a fool; and 'such a disagreeable ill-mannered fool, too,' she would add.

As to Madge, the Marchmonts scarcely existed for her. They were quite out of *her* pale. 'It was so common to be so Low Church,' she averred. 'It was not like a well-bred lady.' She did not waste her thoughts on such people.

We know, through Oliver, what Lady Lavinia thought of the Sheridans!

Upon entering the house, her ladyship's first act was to glance at the hall table, which was covered with letters.

'Nothing from Oliver,' she exclaimed presently, in an angry, disappointed tone.

'Perhaps, my dear, he was not aware that we returned to-day,' mildly suggested

Mr. Marchmont, speaking to his wife in a very different tone to the one in which he had been addressing the footman about the luggage.

‘I told him we were coming back at once,’ replied her ladyship drily. Then she suddenly caught sight of a long, thin envelope, half-buried beneath the pile of circulars, upon which she pounced eagerly. ‘Here is a letter from Eliza Fleming, John. Very likely it contains news of Oliver. I dare say he has gone to stay for a day or two with the Flemings before returning to us.’

‘Oh yes, very likely,’ echoed Mr. Marchmont; ‘very likely indeed. Come into the dining-room, my love,’—he always called his wife ‘my love’ when he was beginning to grow fidgety—‘and show me the letter.’

So into the dining-room they went, and in that hideous, uncomfortable apartment, with prints of the Duke of Wellington, Lord Aberdeen, and Mr. Disraeli looking down upon them from the frightful grey-

and-blue papered walls, Lady Lavinia proceeded to read aloud 'Eliza's' epistle.

Letter-writing is supposed to be a lost art. Certainly, it was not one in which Lady Fleming excelled; nevertheless, the perusal of her four closely covered sheets appeared to give the greatest satisfaction to Lady Lavinia and to Mr. Marchmont until they came to that cream of a woman's letter—the postscript; and then their faces fell many inches.

'P.S.—We met your son at the ball last week, and he has dined with us *once* since then. We were sorry to be out when he called. I told him to come over to luncheon whenever he pleased, as we were always at home at *that* hour. But he has not been. I dare say he finds our house dull after Ryde, where he has, I know, many friends. I occasionally see him, when we drive into the town to shop, walking with that pretty Miss Urquhart.'

'Urquhart! Urquhart!' cried Mr. Marchmont; 'who is Miss Urquhart?'

‘The only Urquhart I ever heard of,’ said Lady Lavinia, ‘is that dreadful Captain Urquhart who eloped with Averil Munroe!’

‘But it is not likely,’ protested Mr. Marchmont, ‘that Oliver should know such people.’

‘I wish he had never gone to Ryde!’ cried Lady Lavinia angrily. ‘I can’t bear that style of place. Oliver would have been far better at Marchmont.’

‘It is no good thinking of that now,’ said the banker moodily. ‘He *is* at Ryde, and the only thing to be done is to get him away as soon as possible. You had better sit down and write to him at once.’

‘I intend doing so,’ replied her ladyship crossly.

And then she repaired to her own room, where she sat down and penned a few lines to her son, begging him to join her without delay.

It was on Saturday that she wrote and despatched this letter to Oliver, and on

the following Monday morning she set out in her brougham on a shopping expedition. She had several purchases to make before leaving town, and she wished to get through her business before Oliver's return. But it was not on her own account that she was paying such a lengthy visit to Redmayne's.

She had no autumn country-house toilettes for herself to select. All that she bought to-day was for the Marchmont poor, who had only too much given to them: so much, indeed, that they had learnt ere this that if they did not work they would be kept.

It was the old banker who insisted upon so much almsgiving. Her ladyship was of an economical turn of mind, and hated disbursing; and it was with the most unamiable expression of countenance that she selected the 'linsey-woolseys' for the school-children's Sunday frocks, and the scarlet flannel for the rheumatic old men and women in the almshouses.

It was whilst she was purchasing the

last-named article that she suddenly felt conscious of somebody staring at her, and trying to catch her eye ; and, glancing up for a moment, she caught sight of a certain Mrs. MacKillop, whom she knew very slightly, bowing and smiling to her across a sea of pale green gauze de Chambery.

Lady Lavinia returned the bow, but not the smile. She was not in the habit of smiling at acquaintances who were not members of St. Mark's congregation.

'How are you, dear Lady Lavinia ?' inquired Mrs. MacKillop, with effusion.

'Quite well, thank you. Are your daughters well ?'

'Yes, thanks, dear Lady Lavinia. I am choosing some dresses for them for the Floors ball. We only returned from Ryde a day or two ago ; we went down there for a little gaiety, and now we are *flying* through town on our way north.'

The last piece of information was vouchsafed loudly and eagerly, for the Glasgow manufacturer's widow did not choose Lady Lavinia to suppose that she and her

daughters intended to remain in London during September, nor that they had no invitations to Scotland.

But it was all lost upon Lady Lavinia, who did not care what the McKillops did, or where they went, and who merely replied : ' Oh, indeed !'

' And we saw your son at Ryde,' continued the irrepressible lady, ' looking so well. He was at the Club Ball, devoting himself to that lovely Miss Urquhart.'

Lady Lavinia felt her throat contract, and her heart suddenly turn to ice ; but she answered with perfect composure :

' I know that my son was there.'

' Well, one must admire his taste. Miss Urquhart is lovely. The gentlemen all rave about her. Lord Aubrey Littleddale used to say that such a smile as hers had not been seen since the days of Woffington. And you know she sat to Monsieur Lesoeur for his celebrated picture " Mélusine." And as to Mr. Ripley, he went mad about her. The first time I ever saw her she was on his drag, and——'

‘I am not acquainted with Mr. Ripley. Good-morning, Mrs. McKillop.’ Then, to the shopman: ‘I’ll take the flannel with me, but please send the other things by rail to Marchmont to-day;’ and bowing frigidly to the McKillop group, Lady Lavinia marched out of the shop, leaving the manufacturer’s widow feeling very uncertain as to whether she had done a wise or a foolish thing in trying to disparage Cosy Urquhart to young Marchmont’s mamma.

And in the meantime young Marchmont’s mamma had stepped into the brougham and was driving home, feeling cold, and faint, and sick at heart. ‘That lovely Miss Urquhart!’ How she was growing to hate the sound of those words! Like Rebekah of old, she was ready to cry in her anguish: ‘If my son take a wife of the daughters of Heth . . . what good shall my life be unto me?’

But no; it should never come to that, Lady Lavinia was resolved. She was no fond mother who would yield rather than

see her child miserable. She was ready to thwart Oliver's dearest hopes, to blight his life, to break his heart, to do anything rather than consent to receive Miss Urquhart as a daughter-in-law.

'And what a bold, dreadful girl she must be to drive about on Mr. Ripley's drag, and to stand for Mélusine to Monsieur Lesoeur,' she said to herself. She had not the faintest idea who Mélusine was, or what she did, but the name did not sound respectable, her ladyship thought; not that she would have approved had she heard that Cosy had stood for the Virgin Martyr. And then Monsieur Lesoeur was an artist and a Frenchman! A terrible combination!

At five o'clock Oliver made his appearance, looking very nervous and gloomy. Lady Lavinia had not heard his cab drive up, and he surprised her by walking into the drawing-room just as Gregory, the footman, was bringing in tea.

After the coolest of greetings had been exchanged—for her ladyship could not get

up any warmth of manner even to her son—she opened the battle with the remark that he ‘seemed to have liked Ryde very much, as he had stayed there so long.’ And then she looked at him as if he had committed a crime in so doing.

‘I didn’t care much about the place,’ mumbled Oliver; ‘but there were some nice people there.’

‘Who were they?’ Her ladyship’s tone had grown positively sepulchral.

‘The Urquharts, and Ralph Dufferin.’

‘I dare say it was pleasant for you meeting Ralph; but who are the Urquharts? Surely you can’t mean the family of that dreadful Captain Urquhart who eloped with Averil Munroe.’

‘Mrs. Urquhart was a Miss Munroe; she is dead.’

‘Yes, she died of a broken heart; wretched woman!’ replied Lady Lavinia, savagely. ‘Well, Oliver,’ she continued, ‘I am surprised that you should have made such acquaintances, but I am far more surprised that you should like them.’

Perhaps you are not aware that Captain Urquhart is quite out of society. In London, no gentleman would be seen speaking to him.'

'He is horrid, I admit,' said Oliver; 'but his children are very nice. And, mother,' he added, in a more pleading tone, 'I do want you to know, and to like, Miss Urquhart; she is charming, and you cannot hold her responsible for her father's sins.'

'Certainly not; but I do not see how I can visit her without making his acquaintance. And that I positively refuse to do!'

'I am sorry to hear you say so,' replied Oliver, in a sad but perfectly determined tone of voice; 'for I have asked Miss Urquhart to be my wife.'

'To be your wife! Oliver, are you mad? You must surely know that such a thing can't be.'

'I have asked her, and she has promised.'

'Promised! what nonsense! Of course

she promised. Doubtless she is too ignorant to know that such marriages are not permitted in decent society—which *she* knows nothing about, I'm told.'

'Who told you anything about her?' asked Oliver, firing up. 'That woman at Castle Core, I suppose.'

Lady Lavinia fairly gasped. Could this be the end of the dispensation that Canon Rowe had been so long predicting? It *must* be at hand when Oliver—*her* son Oliver—could allude to Eliza Fleming as 'that woman.'

'Lady Fleming looks upon Captain Urquhart as—as all proper-minded people look upon such sinners.'

'We were not speaking of Captain Urquhart,' said Oliver doggedly. 'You said that you had been told that Miss Urquhart knew nothing about decent society. Who told you such a thing? What did they mean by it?'

'They mean, I suppose,' replied Lady Lavinia, 'that she associates with her father's friends.'

'She doesn't. She cuts them!' exclaimed Oliver, surlily but triumphantly.

Her ladyship looked ready to faint. A child to dare to cut her father's friends! A girl of nineteen to presume to have an opinion of her own on *any* subject! What a daughter-in-law such a young person would prove!

'Oliver, your father will never—never hear of this!' she exclaimed.

And then she paused to see what effect this announcement would have on her son.

'Are you going to set him against it?' he asked moodily.

'There will be no need for that. He will not require me to tell him that Captain Urquhart's daughter is a person we cannot receive under any circumstances.'

Then Oliver set down his half-finished cup of tea, and walked straight out of the room.

'He has gone to his father,' thought Lady Lavinia, and she hurried after him, determined that Oliver should not strike

the first blow without her being there to parry it ; for Mr. Marchmont was not to be trusted alone. Of course he would never *consent* to this marriage ; but then his manner was so nervous and uncertain, that it might very probably convey the impression that his refusal was not unalterable.

But Oliver had not gone to his father, and Lady Lavinia found her husband sitting alone in the study.

‘Mr. Marchmont,’ she began, in her gloomiest tone, ‘the very worst we feared has come to pass.’

‘Good heavens ! what ?’

‘Oliver has actually—without consulting us—proposed to that Miss Urquhart.’

‘Good gracious ! How very improper ! Tut, tut, tut !’

‘You must tell him that it cannot be. You, as his father, must speak to him, and say that the marriage is impossible——’

‘But if he asks why ?’

‘Say that the connection is most undesir-

able, that the Urquharts are in a fast, disreputable set, that——'

'Yes—yes; very true. Very true! But why did you not tell Oliver all this yourself?'

'Because it is your place to do so. You are his father, and the head of the house. It is for you to decide. I did express my disapprobation: it is now your turn to speak.'

'You tell me that it is my place to decide, and then you tell me that I *must* refuse: so it seems that you have decided for me, Lavinia, and that I have no choice in the matter.'

The old gentleman spoke very querulously.

'And pray, Mr. Marchmont, may I ask, are you anxious for this marriage? Do you wish to see our only son wedded to Captain Urquhart's daughter? Remember that a man, when he marries, passes into his wife's family. And just think what a family he would enter! Just think of Oliver associating with Captain Urquhart and Captain Urquhart's friends!'

‘Oh no, of course that would never do!’ exclaimed Mr. Marchmont testily.

‘And then remember what the girl herself is!’ continued her ladyship; ‘a fast, frivolous, unprincipled flirt—a girl who has had her name coupled with that of a wild dissolute man like Mr. Ripley——’

‘Oh, good gracious!’ interrupted Mr. Marchmont; ‘that will never do. You are right, Lavinia; this folly must be put a stop to at once.’

‘Tell me with whom thou goest, and I will tell thee what thou doest,’ Lady Lavinia went on, driving in the nail. ‘Mr. Ripley is a sample of Miss Urquhart’s companions. His admiration of her is a well-known fact; and has been *talked about*. Not that I wish to take away this unhappy girl’s character. I merely wish to prove to you that she is no fit person to enter our family. We are told not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers. Oh, if Oliver had but chosen Emily Fleming!’

To this wish Mr. Marchmont made no reply. The Fleming alliance had never

been sought for by him. He thought Emily plain, and unattractive in every way ; and he strongly suspected ' Eliza ' of being but a lukewarm Evangelical after all ; and although he was quite as averse to the Urquhart connection as ever his wife could be, he was glad that Oliver's stay in Ryde had not terminated in an engagement with the young lady of Lady Lavinia's choice. He was somewhat of a snob at heart, was the old Low Church banker of Mincing Lane—and the Flemings were not born in the purple. Sir William was only a Knight, and Mr. Marchmont, who had married a lady 'with a handle to her name,' now wished his son to do the same.

' Ah, well,' he said slowly, as the gong tolled the hour for dinner ; ' I'll speak to Oliver by-and-by, and tell him that it cannot be.'

Then Lady Lavinia felt perfectly satisfied ; for, having once said a thing, Mr. Marchmont, who was as obstinate as his son, was safe to stick to it.

‘The marriage will never take place now,’ she said to herself, as she went downstairs to the dining-room, ‘unless Oliver sets our wishes at defiance; but such a girl as Miss Urquhart might even incite him to do that.’

The subject of the engagement was not mooted between father and son until Lady Lavinia had left the dining-room; but directly she had retired, Mr. Marchmont turned to Oliver, and said rather abruptly :

‘Your mother tells me that you wish to marry Miss Urquhart.’

‘Yes, father; and——’

‘It is out of the question, Oliver. I have thought the subject well over, and I cannot sanction the engagement.’

Oliver turned very pale, but he attempted no remonstrance, knowing well how useless it would be. He merely replied quietly :

‘I am sorry to hear you say this; for I am engaged to the young lady, and I cannot break my word.’

'I presume, Oliver, that you will not dream of marrying against my—against *our* wishes.'

Oliver was silent.

'Oliver, speak! Promise me that you will not marry this girl!'

'I cannot promise you that, for I have already plighted my faith to her;' said Oliver, in a low but very firm voice.

'How old is she?'

'Nineteen.'

'Promise me, at all events, that you will not marry her until she comes of age!'

'Yes, I will promise that, if you wish it,' said Oliver slowly. 'But remember, father, I shall marry her directly she does come of age. I shall not wait an hour after that.'

It was the old banker's turn to be silent now. He sat on in his comfortable arm-chair, sipping port and saying nothing, but consoling himself with the thought that many things may happen in two years, and that one thing should assuredly happen: he, John Oliver Marchmont, would add a

codicil to his will, decreeing, that in the event of his son espousing Miss Urquhart, the whole of his, John Oliver Marchmont's, vast fortune should go to the Society for carrying on Mission Work in the South Sea Islands.

Having decided upon this, he then retired to his study, where he penned the letter to Captain Urquhart of which we have already heard. It was not a pleasant letter. It was indeed, as Cosy had said, 'not the letter of one gentleman to another;' and it was, moreover, a letter that Mr. Marchmont would not have dared to send to anyone occupying a position less dubious than that which Jack Urquhart filled. And the perusal of it made the latter curse and swear, until his poor daughter, accustomed as she was to bad language, turned cold and faint with horror and disgust.

The same post that brought this unpleasant epistle for Captain Urquhart brought Cosy one from Oliver. In it he informed her of his promise to his father ;

but he declared at the same time his unalterable intention of never, never giving her up.

'And if you will remain true to me, all will come right in time—in two years hence,' he said.

Then he went on to tell her that he should not expect her to correspond with him, as doubtless Captain Urquhart would forbid her so doing, but that he hoped that she would send him 'just one line in reply to this,' and that she would believe 'how entirely and unalterably he was hers—'O. M.'

To this effusion she replied by the asked-for line, which ran as follows :

'Of corse I will stick to you as I promisd. I never brake *my* word.'

That was her letter, and it was not, it must be admitted, a well-worded or a well-spelt letter ; neither was it the letter of a girl in love. And although Oliver had not looked for any warm expressions of devotion from his *fiancée*, still the receipt of

that note gave him as much pain as pleasure. He could not have analysed his sensations, but he felt miserable as he gazed at that dirty, blotted scrap of paper, and tried to decipher those almost illegible words that went to form the curt, cold sentence, announcing that his lady-love intended to be faithful to him.

It was with a heavy sigh that he locked up this—the first letter he had ever received from Cosy—in his desk, telling himself as he did so that it was the thought of her utter ignorance, of her untaught state, and of her neglected childhood that distressed him. He would not admit, even to himself, that it was the dawning consciousness of her entire indifference that was causing him this cold gnawing pain at heart. Like his father, he had a habit of refusing to face disagreeable truths—another outcome of a bringing up that had robbed his mind of all hardihood, in the fear of exposing it to error.



## CHAPTER II.

‘THE WOMAN YOU MARRY.’

‘O reines de nos toits, femmes chastes et saintes,  
Fleurs qui de nos maisons parfumez les enceintes,  
Vous à qui le bonheur enseigne la vertu.

\* \* \* \* \*

Le hasard vous posa dans la sphère suprême.’

V. HUGO.



IN his way to Marchmont, Ralph Dufferin stayed for a night in town, in order to dine with the Sheridans, who were also passing through London on their road to that West-country residence that Lady Lavinia considered they neglected too much. They had been spending the winter at Spa, whither they had been ordered for the benefit of poor

Agnes, who had never been quite strong since the attack of fever she had suffered from during the previous winter in Rome.

Lady Margaret was much interested in Ralph's account of the Ryde engagement, and during his talk with her he grew, half unconsciously, to pity Cosy less and Oliver more.

'I am so sorry for him,' said Lady Margaret. 'This is his first love, and it will be his last, I should think.'

Ralph shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

'I never presume to hazard *that* statement about *anyone*, except on the principle that with some people the last love is always the first.'

'Ah! you may smile, Ralph; but, believe me, Oliver will feel this affair deeply.' Lady Margaret did not wish all Ralph's sympathy to dwell with Miss Urquhart.

'So does she, strange to say!' exclaimed Ralph; 'isn't it extraordinary to think that that girl, who has known half Europe, actually cares for Oliver?'

'So extraordinary that I don't believe it,' replied Lady Margaret, coldly.

'Oh, but she declares she does,' said Ralph; 'and her great redeeming quality is her rare truthfulness.'

Lady Margaret was silent. She disbelieved altogether in Miss Urquhart.

'She is merely a clever little adventurer,' she said to herself.

But she did not say so to Ralph. Now, if Mrs. Dufferin had held that opinion, she would have given vent to it so often that her son would have been tired to death of hearing her make the remark, and each time she repeated it would have lessened its effect upon her hearer. But Lady Margaret was far wiser, and knew the power of silence.

'Ralph is perfectly aware that I don't agree with him, and sooner or later he will come round to my opinion,' she said to herself, knowing well the man she had to deal with, and her influence over him.

'Can't you fancy, mamma, what an ungentlemanlike letter Mr. Marchmont must

have written,' remarked Madge, taking for the first time part in the conversation.

'It is a tiresome business, isn't it, Agnes?' said Ralph, turning to the youngest Miss Sheridan, who was sitting apart from the others, in a remote corner, knitting a shawl, and never speaking.

'It is very sad,' she replied, sighing heavily, 'and Lady Lavinia is very disagreeable.'

Everything seemed very sad to Agnes now. They had just returned from Spa, where *he* had been. And *she* had been there too. And people had remarked that Miss Agnes Sheridan never looked cheerful when Madame de Senac was in the same place with her; and that, moreover, she turned crimson and then pale whenever she happened to pass Lord Aubrey in the company of his siren.

Do not suppose that these signs escaped Lady Margaret's watchful eye. But she paid no apparent heed to them. She knew Agnes too well to suppose that *her* first love would be her last; and she

awaited calmly the rising of another sun on the horizon of her child's life.

There was one marriage she wished to bring about for her, and perhaps she should achieve it if she were wise and not too precipitate. She had not failed to remark how often Ralph's eyes were now turned in the direction of Agnes's corner—Agnes always occupied a corner. Well, those who lived longest would see the most.

'You are going to Marchmont tomorrow, aren't you, Ralph?' asked Lady Margaret presently.

'Yes.'

'How tired you will soon be of *the* subject!' exclaimed Madge. 'I can well fancy how Lady Lavinia will talk of nothing else all day long.'

'Oh, Ralph won't allow that,' interpolated Lady Margaret cheerfully.

'He mayn't be able to help himself,' said Madge; 'there never were such people as the Marchmonts for wearing a subject threadbare. They will go on talk-

ing about Miss Urquhart for the next month to come, until—until the curate is caught out playing battledore, and shuttlecock, or some such nonsense. They are always occupied with trifles.’

‘The marriage of a son is no trifle,’ said Ralph, very gravely; ‘particularly when you happen to disapprove of his choice. I really feel sorry for the Marchmonts, just as I feel sorry for Cosy. Being perfectly independent and disinterested, I can pity them all—except John Oliver!’

‘I could never feel much pity for Lady Lavinia,’ Agnes put in from her corner; ‘she has a cruel tongue!’

Agnes could not forget that the Low Church lady had been rude to *him*.

‘She has a very narrow mind,’ Madge burst forth, remembering Lady Lavinia’s strictures upon her conduct during Lent.

‘Ah well! we have settled them all now,’ laughed Ralph; ‘and to-morrow I start on my special mission to arrange this royal alliance, or rather to overcome the queen-mother’s difficulties.’

'You won't get over Lady Lavinia in a hurry,' said Madge. 'It is impossible to argue a point with people who are not endowed with ordinary reasoning powers, and her obstinacy is like a rock to beat against.'

'Her son resembles her in that respect,' remarked Ralph; 'so it will be a case of two rocks coming in contact. One or the other will be crushed. Which will it be, Agnes?'

'I don't know,' replied Agnes; 'but I should think that Oliver Marchmont had rather more feeling than his mother.'

'Oh, Oliver will have to give in,' said Madge, who was always practical; 'he is quite dependent on his parents; he simply *can't* marry without their money!'

'Certainly not if he marries Miss Urquhart,' exclaimed Lady Margaret; 'she would be an expensive wife, with those wonderful dresses!'

'Her dress is shabby enough nowadays, poor child!' said Ralph. 'The change in that respect struck me painfully.'

'George Ripley is abroad,' thought Lady Margaret; 'and a fresh victim has not been found, I suppose.'

She knew—as she knew most things that went on in her family—that George Ripley had lent Jack Urquhart money over and over again, and she suspected that he had often made presents to Jack Urquhart's daughter—which was not the case.

In truth, he had never given the girl a present in his life. He had once offered her a ring, and she had refused it. She was aware that he had lent her father money, that he had paid for the cross that stood over her mother's grave, and that he had given Franky a sorely-needed suit of clothes: and knowing all that, she considered that he had done quite enough for the friends who were so useless to him. She wasn't going to let him spend money on her, and she told him so very plainly; and he knew her too well to press the matter.

Miss Urquhart was not the style of girl

to be won by gifts ; and George Ripley, with his experience of women of all kinds, knew that far better than Lady Margaret did. Lady Margaret was a clever woman, a far cleverer person in nearly all respects than Mr. Ripley was, but her opinion on any matter connected with a woman whom she had once begun to suspect was worth—what a lady's opinion on such occasions usually is worth ! She did not live and judge—as Mrs. Dufferin lived and judged—by caprice ; but her experience of life had not been sufficiently varied to enable her to pass a correct and impartial judgment on those whose lives were in any degree *hors ligne*.

‘ This is an unfortunate love-affair, isn't it ? ’ Ralph said to Agnes, during the brief *tête-à-tête* they had towards the end of the evening, whilst Lady Margaret and Madge were interviewing a dressmaker.

‘ Ye—es, ’ replied Agnes ; ‘ I'm sorry for Oliver Marchmont. ’

‘ Aren't you sorry for the sufferer of your own sex ? don't you pity Cosy

Urquhart?' asked Ralph, rather reproachfully.

'She doesn't care for him!' replied Agnes, with more decision than was often heard in her voice.

'She says she does, my dear young lady.'

'She doesn't.'

'Now, how do you know that, Agnes? You merely infer it because *you* don't find him attractive. But you see, fortunately, we do not all fall in love with the same person.'

Agnes coloured. She was always on the look-out for sarcasm when this subject was referred to.

'She is no more in love with Oliver Marchmont than—than mamma is,' she maintained.

'But how do you *know*?'

'I am sure of it. There are some things that one knows quite well, but can't exactly——'

'Can't exactly *prove*?'

'Yes.'

'True ; and those are the beliefs to which your sex, my dear Agnes, cling the most fervently—the beliefs they cannot prove. Well, I'm inclined to be of your opinion in this matter, and to think that Cosy has persuaded herself into the idea that she is fond of Oliver, just as her poor mother persuaded herself that she was fond of Jack Urquhart. But I never used to fancy that Cosy was of the self-deceiving order : Averil was.'

'She does not deceive herself,' said Agnes quietly ; 'she does not suppose for one moment that she likes Oliver Marchmont. She wants to marry him because he is rich. If he were poor, she would not look at him. It is horrid for a girl to be like that !' and Agnes's bright eyes filled with tears.

'Agnes, you don't like Cosy Urquhart,' cried Ralph suddenly, turning and looking Agnes full in the face.

She flushed crimson.

'I don't think she is good.'

'Well, she is not so black as she is

painted. Indeed she isn't, Agnes. She has many good qualities.'

'I'm afraid of people like her,' murmured Agnes. 'If I had a brother, I would rather that he died than that he married a girl like Miss Urquhart. If she were good, she would not like so many bad people ; she is deceitful.'

'No, there I must contradict you, my dear ; she is not deceitful.'

'She is ; for she pretends to be fond of Oliver when all the time she cares for somebody else.'

The last few words were drowned in the noise of Lady Margaret's entry, and Ralph did not hear them. If he had, he would have felt somewhat astonished. It would indeed have been news to him to hear that Cosy 'cared for some one else ;' his own belief being that she liked Oliver as well as she liked anybody, and that she would either never love at all—that the power of loving was dead in her, stifled by the noxious atmosphere in which she had been reared—or else that she would fall

hopelessly in love with some utterly impossible person—a prince of the blood royal perhaps, or a Cardinal Archbishop, or anybody else who could not lawfully possess her. And that then—— well, the less said or thought about *that* perhaps the better. She would not be overweighted with principle in a love-affair, although her lady-like feelings and instincts made her scrupulous about money matters.

‘Cosy is an enigma, an insoluble problem,’ Ralph told Lady Margaret, as he bade her good-night; and her ladyship replied that the Sphinx would not be a pleasant person to domesticate, an opinion in which Mr. Dufferin fully concurred.

Cosy’s love for Ralph had been discovered by Agnes long ago—long before Cosy had herself become aware of it—and Agnes had kept the secret better than she had guarded that of her own love-affair; never even breathing a word of her suspicions to anyone. She was a girl who shrunk instinctively from speaking of painful things; and the very thought of Cosy

was painful to her. She always associated Miss Urquhart in her own mind with Madame de Senac, and anything to do with that person was positively revolting to Agnes. She could never bring herself even to mention her rival's name ; she trembled at the sight of her, and shrunk from the very thought of her.

Ralph Dufferin had more than once heard poor little Agnes's infatuation for Lord Aubrey Littledale commented upon and laughed at in a merciless manner ; but he attached no importance to what he termed mere idle chatter. Agnes was a child, he told himself, a romantic, impressionable child. She wasn't really in love with Littledale. She did not know what being in love meant. She had met Lord Aubrey at some party before she came out, and he had danced with her and taken notice of her ; and she had felt pleased, and surprised, and flattered—but not in love ! Agnes in love—nonsense ! The idea was absurd ! She was certainly very missish, but that would all wear off.

He did not mind a girl of her age being somewhat missish and sentimental. He preferred it. It was a fault on the right side, and far better than being bold and self-asserting like Cosy Urquhart.

Somehow or other Ralph was always instituting comparisons in his own mind between those two girls—Agnes and Cosy ; and invariably to the disadvantage of the latter. Cosy was beautiful and bewitching, he told himself ; she fascinated the imagination and subjugated the senses, but she never touched the heart as Agnes did. He had genuinely admired the courage and the sense of honour that Cosy had displayed in reference to that affair of Lesoeur's. But oh, how hateful it was, he said, that any woman should be mixed up in such a business ! What a horribly contaminating scene for her to witness ! He could not understand a man choosing a wife from a house in which such scenes were enacted ; for no woman could be present on such an occasion without her mind and soul becoming tainted

by the contact with such grossness and dishonour.

Jack Urquhart’s companionship would soil the most spotless purity, Ralph maintained, for no one can touch pitch without being defiled. Thank goodness, Agnes Sheridan knew nothing of such iniquity. There were no monsters in *her* family. The only *vaurien* with whom she was connected had been banished from the circle long ago. Agnes had never spoken to George Ripley since she was a little girl in the nursery. Lady Margaret knew how to preserve social and domestic purity.

‘Now my dear mother does *not*,’ thought Ralph; ‘she is so guileless herself that she never believes that anybody is very bad (particularly if they happen to be very pretty) until the knowledge is absolutely forced upon her. And then her indignation knows no bounds; and she begins to blame everyone right and left for not having “warned” her; forgetting that she *would not* be warned. Poor dear mother!’

‘There are some women whom one

pities, and of whom one is fond after a fashion, but whom one does not marry,' Mr. Dufferin told himself; and he relegated Miss Urquhart to that class. She was of the women whom one doesn't marry. Now, Agnes Sheridan belonged to the class who are born wives.

Ralph was glad of one thing concerning Cosy. He was glad that poor Averil's daughter, and Mary Aventayle's grandchild, had this amount of self-respect in her; that she declined to be dragged into the market-place at Jack Urquhart's bidding, to be knocked down at *his* price to *his* class of buyers. Evidently she was perfectly ready and willing to sell herself—her acceptance of Oliver proved that; but she meant to sell herself only for a name and a ring. She was not going to be used as a decoy by her father. She showed a laudable resolution in giving the cold shoulder to his friends. It was only a pity that she had not selected a more possible husband, for Oliver was so hopelessly far out of her reach: he could not

marry her. Now, Lord Girton could ; but then, perhaps Lord Girton would not. Few men would, Ralph thought ; and those few would all hail from the ranks of the undesirable.





## CHAPTER III.

### DIPL.OMACY.

‘On gagne peu de choses par habileté’

VAUVENARGUES.

‘On peut dominer par la force, mais jamais par la seule adresse.’

*Ibid.*

**M**ARCHMONT was an ugly residence, both without and within; but uglier perhaps within than without. Viewed from the long avenue that led up to it, it merely looked like a barrack or a private lunatic asylum, or any other building for which beauty is not taken into account; but its interior was positively hideous. The furnishing of it had been handed over to an Oxford Street

upholsterer who flourished during an ante-high-art-decoration period, and he had done his utmost to contribute to the ugliness of the house that Oliver admired so much. In the sitting-rooms a shade of the crudest grass-green prevailed, while the bedrooms were all hung with a cold blue pink that Ralph used to declare gave him the nightmare whenever he slept in one of them, which, as a rule, he declined to do for more than a couple of nights at a time. But in accordance with a promise he had made to Oliver before leaving Ryde, he consented this year to sacrifice himself for a whole week, and after passing that day in town, to which reference has been made in a previous chapter, he went down on the Thursday afternoon to the old banker's country seat, whither Mrs. Dufferin had preceded him.

On the evening of his arrival he had a long talk with Oliver, any account of which we will spare ourselves. 'Les histoires amoureuses ne sont bonnes qu'à ceux qui se les content a soi-même ;' and the history

that Oliver told would have been wearisome even to the ears of the most devoted friendship. Ralph was simply bored to death with it ; and when the following day, after five o'clock tea, Lady Lavinia invited him to accompany her into the conservatory, he felt a terrible foreboding that he was going to hear the whole story over again.

The conservatory was the one bright spot about Marchmont, and his hostess's love of her flowers was one of her redeeming qualities, Ralph used to declare ; and he often told his mother that it might have been made the stepping-stone to better things if only John Oliver had known how to manage his wife properly. But he did not know ; and her conservatory continued to be the one thing of beauty in which Lady Lavinia had any joy.

'You have a fine show of roses here !' said Ralph, looking round him.

'Yes ; and the pelargoniums were beautiful. You should have seen this

place two months ago, Ralph ; it was a perfect blaze of pink and white and crimson. I was quite sorry to leave it. Ah ! I wish we had none of us left home this year.' And then, after a pause : ' You know all about this disastrous affair ?'

' Oliver's engagement, you mean ?'

' Engagement !' cried Lady Lavinia ; ' it is no engagement. There can be no engagement between young people without the sanction of parents. Until that is given, you can only call these affairs foolish, idle, sinful flirtations.'

' I am sorry that you should have been so worried,' said Ralph soothingly.

' I am very much worried, Ralph, and exceedingly displeased, as I have a right to be. How I wish that you had been at Ryde all along ! It would never have happened then.'

Ralph shrugged his shoulders :

' Who can say ? I know of no infallible receipt, my dear lady, for preventing two young people from falling in love with each other.'

'Falling in love!' her ladyship did not like that expression; it sounded almost improper to her.

'There is no love in the case,' she said coldly; 'it is a mere idle unhallowed fancy. How can you love anybody whom you have only known a few days? Nonsense!'

Ralph was on the point of saying something about the mystery of the great passion that seizes upon its victims like a fever, and rides them like destiny; but remembering who and what his companion was, he checked himself.

'Oliver fancies that he cares for that girl,' continued her ladyship; 'but it is all fancy, and I don't believe that she cares one bit about him. Of course she wants to marry him. Oh! she must be a bold fast girl, I'm certain.'

Ralph replied with a smile that she was a nice girl, and that he liked her.

'But Oliver cannot be allowed to marry her,' repeated Lady Lavinia, whose sole form of argument was reiteration.

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‘I am sorry to hear you say so,’ replied Ralph; ‘although, of course, I am not astonished. But I can’t help thinking that Oliver won’t renounce the affair easily. He seems very much in earnest. Wouldn’t it be better that if the marriage does take place, it should have your sanction and approval?’

‘That it can never have.’

‘But why not? Oh! I quite admit that it is not an alliance that you would have chosen; but really you need not object so strongly to it. There is nothing against Miss Urquhart, personally.’

‘There is her bringing up, to begin with.’

‘It has, perhaps, injured her less than you imagine. And if you undertook to mould her——’

Her ladyship liked the sound of that word, and her face brightened up for the moment. But it would never do to listen to the voice of the charmer, and she interrupted Ralph very sharply:

‘It is quite out of the question. I must

beg that you will say no more about it. We cannot receive Captain Urquhart's daughter under any circumstances.'

'Ah! it is that blackguard Jack, of course, who stands in her way,' thought Ralph.

Then he made one more appeal :

'Would it not be better to give in than to run the risk of Oliver marrying without your knowledge and consent? He is very headstrong.'

'He will never be so headstrong as to do that!' exclaimed Lady Lavinia. 'If he does, he marries into certain beggary.'

And then she told Ralph about the codicil that John Oliver intended adding to his will — a proceeding that Ralph mentally stigmatised as a blackguard shame, but quite worthy of the old banker.

'So you see, Ralph,' continued her ladyship, 'that if Oliver marries Miss Urquhart, they will be penniless.—This is the plant that took the prize.'

Once or twice during the course of their

interview, Ralph again felt his way towards returning to the subject of the engagement ; but he soon saw that Lady Lavinia was quite obdurate—that nothing would make her give in—that she was almost angry with him for attempting to sway her ; and so he finally gave up the affair, with the comfortable consciousness that he had at all events kept his promise to Cosy, and *tried* to ‘talk Lady Lavinia over.’ Such a hopeless end to strive after !

‘Well, I have done my best, but I’ve failed!’ he exclaimed half an hour later, as he and his mother were sitting together over the fire in Mrs. Dufferin’s room, waiting for the dressing-bell to ring. ‘The Marchmonts will never give in.’

‘I felt quite certain of that,’ replied Mrs. Dufferin ; ‘and, after all, we can hardly expect (knowing what they are) that they should.’

‘And Oliver won’t give in either.’

‘Oh, he must !’

‘He won’t. He is obstinate as his

parents; he'll marry into penury rather than resign Cosy.'

'Perhaps Cosy won't be so ready to marry into penury,' exclaimed Mrs. Dufferin warmly. 'So lovely a girl will find hundreds of men anxious to marry her.'

'My mother's old delusion,' thought Ralph. 'Beauty is to carry everything before it. How strange that the teachings of life have not proved to her the fallacy of her theory!'

'Take care, Ralph, that *you* don't fall in love with Cosy Urquhart!' exclaimed Mrs. Dufferin suddenly, in a voice of positive exultation, as if she had just made a very valuable discovery.

Ralph burst out laughing.

'My dear mother, you may set your mind at rest on that point. I shouldn't fall in love with poor Cosy, not if there were no other woman left in Europe. I could not be in love with anyone of whom I should ever have cause to feel ashamed; and Cosy's spelling and Cosy's ways have often made me blush.'

There was something in his tone that carried conviction with it, and Mrs. Dufferin, who had never really felt the slightest alarm on the subject, was now perfectly easy about her son and Cosy, and quite ready to stand up for the latter—as Ralph would wish her to do — before Lady Lavinia.

But with the best intentions possible poor Mrs. Dufferin was not a good diplomatist, and these conferences with her hostess, which took place mostly after Ralph had quitted Marchmont for a time, had a damaging rather than a beneficial influence upon Cosy's fate, for they left Lady Lavinia under the impression that Miss Urquhart was an even less desirable daughter-in-law than she had supposed. All the good that Ralph had effected by saying that Cosy was a nice girl, and that he liked her, was completely undone by his mother's extravagant praises of her beauty, and her powers of fascination, and of the frantic admiration they excited in all breasts ; and her ladyship ended by

deciding that Miss Urquhart must be loud, forward, and ignorant, with but little to recommend her save her sad story and her beautiful face.

‘She is very, very lovely—the prettiest girl I ever saw,’ Mrs. Dufferin would tell Lady Lavinia twenty times in the course of the morning, when the friends were sitting together with their work in the conservatory; ‘and of course it is not her fault, poor child, that she is so terribly ignorant, and can scarcely read or write. We did all we could to induce Averil to send her to school; we even offered to pay for her schooling; and Averil always promised that she should be sent. But there! it was like all Averil’s promises, it was never kept.’

‘And I suppose Miss Urquhart is perfectly conscious of her own personal attractions?’ Lady Lavinia would say with much severity, and in the gloomiest tone.

‘Oh, of course she is,’ Mrs. Dufferin would reply cheerfully, thinking how foolish it was of Lady Lavinia to suppose

that Cosy could remain ignorant of her rare powers of attraction. 'How could she help being so? It is a pity, though, that she is thrown into such a bad set of men—men of the worst style—who flatter her and pay her compliments from morning till night. It is the sort of thing that Ralph dislikes so for a young girl. It used to make him so angry when we were all in Paris two years ago. You know, my son is very fond of Cosy Urquhart; he says she is a good little girl, and very affectionate.'

'To him, I suppose,' thought Lady Lavinia, with something like a pang of jealousy at heart.

*That feeling dies so hard in the oldest breast.*

'And she has a charming manner, too, that takes wherever she goes. I remember her coming in to us one evening when we were staying at the Rivoli—she was only sixteen then—and we were all struck by her graceful ease and self-possession.'

'I don't like to hear of ease and self-

possession in a girl of sixteen,' said Lady Lavinia grimly.

Altogether poor Mrs. Dufferin did more harm than good by her gushing praises of Cosy, as Ralph discovered before he had been back in the house four-and-twenty hours.

'Not that it makes much difference,' he said to himself: 'for the Marchmonts will never give in; they are determined upon that.'

And, realising this fact, he soon became almost angry with Oliver for his obstinacy, and for what Ralph termed his sulkiness.

Poor fellow! he did not mean to be sulky. It was just his manner. But it was an unfortunate manner in one who needed sympathy and condolence. Like his mother, he had a disagreeable trick of reiteration. He would harp for ever upon one string. There was nothing to be got out of him but that incessant:

'I mean to marry Cosy. Whatever anyone may say, I mean to marry her.'

He never raved of her beauty nor expa-

tiated upon his love for her. He only repeated his determination to marry her. Sometimes his voice and manner would irritate Ralph to such an extent that he longed to cry out : ' Suppose she doesn't mean to marry you ? '

' I wish Lesoeur would marry Cosy Urquhart,' Ralph said one day to Lady Margaret Sheridan, who, with her daughters, had come over from some neighbouring country house, where they were staying, to call upon the Marchmonts—and to see Ralph !

' He is married,' replied Lady Margaret. ' Madge ! Agnes ! don't you remember a handsome dark woman, dressed in red and gold, whom we noticed at the opera one night last season ? Somebody told me she was Madame Lesoeur.'

' Very possibly,' replied Madge calmly ; ' Miss Urquhart has a special gift for attracting married men. Perhaps she is afraid of being accused of trying to catch a husband, and so she flirts with those who can't marry her.'

Agnes said nothing. She was often miserable, often jealous, but never satirical like her sister, who could be very bitter for so High Church a young lady.





## CHAPTER IV.

### SCANDAL.

‘Le désespoir comble non seulement notre misère, mais notre faiblesse.’

VAUVENARGUES.

‘L’envie ne saurait se cacher. Elle accuse et juge sans preuves . . . son langage est rempli de fiel, d’exagération, et d’injure.’

*Ibid.*

**B**EFORE the Dufferins left Marchmont for good, Ralph prevailed upon his mother to write and ask Cosy to spend a month with them at Torquay, where they were going to pass the winter.

Of course Mrs. Dufferin acceded to his •

request. She only lived to gratify Ralph's wishes ; but she demurred a little before she sent the letter. She did not wish Lady Lavinia to think that she was encouraging the affair with Oliver, and she told Ralph so ; but he would not listen to such an objection for one moment.

'Lady Lavinia's wishes are nothing to me,' he said very decidedly. 'Of course we should not encourage that folly. Nobody in their senses would. But we cannot allow Lady Lavinia's fears to influence our choice of a guest. I think we owe Cosy an invitation, and I really should be so glad to get her away from that cottage for a little. It must be awful for her just now. And besides—who knows?—she may meet somebody at Torquay who will put Oliver out of her head altogether. If she does, we shall have done Lady Lavinia a service.'

'And Oliver?'

'Oh, Oliver must get over it. Ninety-nine men out of a hundred have to get over their first love.'

Then Mrs. Dufferin gave way ; secretly rejoicing at the prospect of having a beauty—and such a beauty—to chaperon.

The invitation was written, and Ralph posted it as soon as they arrived in London, where they were to stay for a few days before proceeding on their journey westward.

In due course of time an answer arrived. The invitation was declined—and not in the most polite terms—by Jack himself.

Cosy had gone straight to her father with Mrs. Dufferin's letter in her hand :

‘ Papa, I have got an invitation to go to Torquay for a month.’

‘ Well, you can't go !’

‘ Why not ?’

‘ Why not ? Why, because I've got no money.’

‘ You won three hundred pounds last month.’

‘ And you bagged fifty. What have you done with them ?’

‘ Paid our debts.’

‘ Well, if you will indulge in that expen-

sive luxury, you can't expect me to be supplying you with the funds. Who has asked you to Torquay ?

‘ Mrs. Dufferin.’

‘ That d—d old cat ! Then you certainly shan't go. I suppose you want to be meeting that young tub-jumper again. I'm not going to have anything of that kind, Cosy, I can tell you. You shall neither see him, write to him, nor hear from him.’

He was in one of his brutal tempers this morning, the result of drink and unsuccessful play over-night ; and Cosy was sorry that she had not waited for a happier moment to make her appeal. Sadly she turned to leave the room. Just as she reached the door her father called after her :

‘ Why the —— do you want to go to such a dull hole ?’

‘ I should like to be with the Dufferins ; and besides, I think the change might do me good. I don't feel well.’

‘ If you want change, come to the south in Penter's yacht.’

‘ No, I will not do that.’

‘You will not! What do you mean?’

‘What I say.’

‘You will have the kindness to do what I tell you. Remember you are under age, and you daren’t disobey. I can compel you.’

‘You had better not try, papa. I have borne a good deal, but there are limits to endurance. I can’t and I won’t bear beyond a certain point.’

Something in her face and her manner cowed him. He was not a brave man by nature; and if he had had any conscience he would have been a coward.

‘How pale she looks!’ he said to himself, as the door closed upon Cosy’s retreating figure; ‘and thinner than Averil ever was. But hang it all! Cosy was always thin, and always had a delicate complexion. And I haven’t money to be sending her all over England for change of air. She has lots of change; more than most girls have. We shan’t be here after March, and then we shall go abroad again. She’ll be quite satisfied then, and she’ll forget all about

that young Marchmont when she gets to a place where there is something to amuse her.' He did not add that he might have had more money to spend on change of air and amusement for his delicate daughter if he had not ordered a ruby ring for his Daisy the previous week ; an ornament which had not yet been paid for, but which would certainly have to be before he quitted the Isle of Wight.

Left to himself to chew the bitter cud of his own reflections, Jack's temper grew worse and worse. . He could not call Cosy down to entertain him after the quarrel they had just had ; and, moreover, Cosy had ceased to be entertaining nowadays. Then he had made a big fool of himself in buying that ring for Daisy Penter. Daisy ! such a name for a woman of five-foot-ten, and measuring anything you please round the chest ! Daisy indeed ! And then the season was over, and Cosy was not married, and she was actually fretting ! Yes, he did believe that she was being fool enough to fret after that d—d young prig, whose

father had been so cursedly insolent. No! Cosy should not go to the Dufferins'—not she! They were all in the same stable, the Dufferins and the Marchmonts—far too big swells for him! Cosy must remain in his set, and marry in his set, as *the other lot* chose to snub her, and be impertinent to him! Damn them! And then, after helping himself to two wine-glasses of cognac, which he tossed off one after the other, he sat down and wrote to Mrs. Dufferin himself, in a very unsteady hand, informing her in a rather impertinent way that his daughter never went anywhere without him, but that the little boys might go to her instead of Cosy if she pleased.

To which polite offer Mrs. Dufferin made no reply.

If Miss Urquhart was thoroughly wretched just now, her unsuccessful rival was not much happier.

The Flemings had succeeded the Dufferins at Marchmont, and Emily had never paid a less pleasant visit to the home she had once so fondly hoped to call

her own. She saw literally nothing of Oliver. He was absorbed in business—went up to town by an early train, and only returned home just in time for dinner, during which meal he would either remain perfectly silent, or else he would plunge into City talk with his father.

It was quite in vain that Lady Lavinia complained of him to John Oliver. The old banker took his son's part, and was delighted to see how devoted he had become to his work.

'Devoted to his work! Nonsense!' cried Lady Lavinia angrily. 'He is doing this to annoy me, because I refused to receive that young person to whom he has taken such an unfortunate—such an unhallowed fancy.'

'My dear love, I think you are mistaken,' replied Mr. Marchmont placidly. 'I believe that Oliver is quite getting over that folly. He has never mentioned the subject to me again. In fact, he is so taken up with business just now that he has no time for the nonsense that engrossed his hours of idleness. He is growing

older, and he is settling down ; for which I am very glad, for I am growing an old man. It would have been sad indeed had Heaven given me a son who was of no assistance to me in my calling.'

All through life Mr. John Oliver Marchmont had resolutely turned away from either seeing or doing disagreeable things, although he very often said them ; but then that was quite another matter. He had refused his consent to his son marrying Miss Urquhart, because it was his duty and his pleasure so to do. But it was neither his duty nor his pleasure to notice that Oliver was a changed being, growing old before his time, more dull and spiritless than ever ; and therefore he did not and would not see it.

'Oliver is simply settling down,' he maintained to his wife ; 'learning to look upon life as the solemn thing that it is, not the frivolous affair that so many young men seem to consider it. Thank God, *our* son is not frivolous !'

So the old banker argued, and continued

to cry 'Peace, peace,' where there was no peace, while Lady Lavinia grew more grim and cross and gloomy than ever ; and the gulf between Oliver and his parents widened daily.

Neither, as I said before, was Emily Fleming having a good time of it just now. To be back again at Marchmont, in the old neighbourhood, where everybody had always *set her down* to Oliver, and to find that Oliver would scarcely speak to her, that he openly avoided her, and that his attachment to another girl was the talk of the county—for of course the whole story had leaked out long ere this—was very galling and mortifying ; and a frowning countenance and a sullen manner in no way tended to enhance the heiress's attractions. Oh, how she hated Cosy Urquhart ! quite as bitterly as the latter had owned to hating her grandmother. But then Cosy hated, and owned it, and called it hatred ; whilst Emily hated, but did not own it, and called hatred pity, and virtuous indignation. She was not

popular with other girls, was Emily; and many a young lady friend was glad of the opportunity of saying something spiteful to her. 'I suppose you saw that lovely Miss Urquhart when you were at Ryde, didn't you?' was a question that she was tired of hearing before she had been a week at Marchmont.

'Of course I saw her,' she would reply coldly; 'but only gentlemen knew her. And mamma does not like to hear me talking about her. She is something dreadful, you know.'

It was a poor piece of spite, a pitiful way of avenging her slighted love. But it was the only one she knew of, and she made use of it. If ever she had a chance of doing her rival a real injury we may feel certain that she would not be slow to avail herself of the opportunity, and that she would not fail to dignify her conduct by some very grand and fine-sounding name.

Lady Fleming and her hostess had of course much to say to each other on the subject of paramount importance—

Cosy ; and their morning conversations in the boudoir, whilst Emily was practising in the drawing-room, were one long chapter of lamentations.

To do Lady Lavinia justice she was not a gossip, and had absolutely no appetite for scandal. She was too stupid to detect evil, and too pure-minded to delight in it when it was revealed to her. If she heard a tale of wrong-doing, she was as blindly censorious as the intellectually below par usually are ; but she never wished to hear such stories. They annoyed her—they put her out. Listening to tales against Miss Urquhart did not afford her the slightest gratification. It only made her angry and indignant that her Oliver should ever have fallen in love with such a girl.

Now Lady Fleming could talk by the hour against Cosy, and enjoy the talk ; and she had endless histories to relate to the disadvantage of Miss Urquhart. Cosy's conduct at the Ryde Ball was one of her favourite themes.

‘I shall never forget her behaviour that

night—never. It was quite disgraceful. It was said that Lord Girton was overheard asking her to elope with him. And you know, people do say that her father would have been delighted if she had ; that she might go off with anybody, for all he cares.'

And then, dreading lest this should be repeated to Oliver, her ladyship began, in racing parlance, to hedge.

'Of course one blames him—not her. Poor child ! how should *she* know better ?'

'Oh, that is absurd !' said Lady Lavinia. 'Of course the girl knows better. Her mother was a respectable, although by no means what I consider a good woman ; and the girl must have learnt from her what purity and decency mean. If she has adopted her father's views, it must be because she prefers them. But Ralph Dufferin declares that she *is* a good girl, and far better than her fame. Not that it makes the slightest difference to me. She will always be Captain Urquhart's daughter, and Captain Urquhart's daughter can never be my son's wife.'

And then the two ladies would go over the old ground for about the twentieth time ; and Lady Lavinia would blame Dr. Jameson, and Lady Fleming would blame Captain Urquhart, and they would both blame Cosy, and inveigh against the evils of runaway marriages, and a foreign education, and a watering-place life. And in the midst of all these reproaches and lamentings, in would walk Emily, with her music-book under her arm, and a frown on her fair, bold forehead ; and then the two elder ladies would immediately change the subject, and would begin to talk about pelargoniums, or the unseemly conduct of Mr. Buck in joining the village boys in a paper-chase, and in losing his hat in a ditch.

‘ Mr. Marchmont had serious thoughts of writing to the Bishop on the subject,’ Lady Lavinia said. And Lady Fleming hoped that he would ; for she considered that Mr. Buck was a scandal to the Church, just as she considered that Miss Urquhart was a scandal to society.



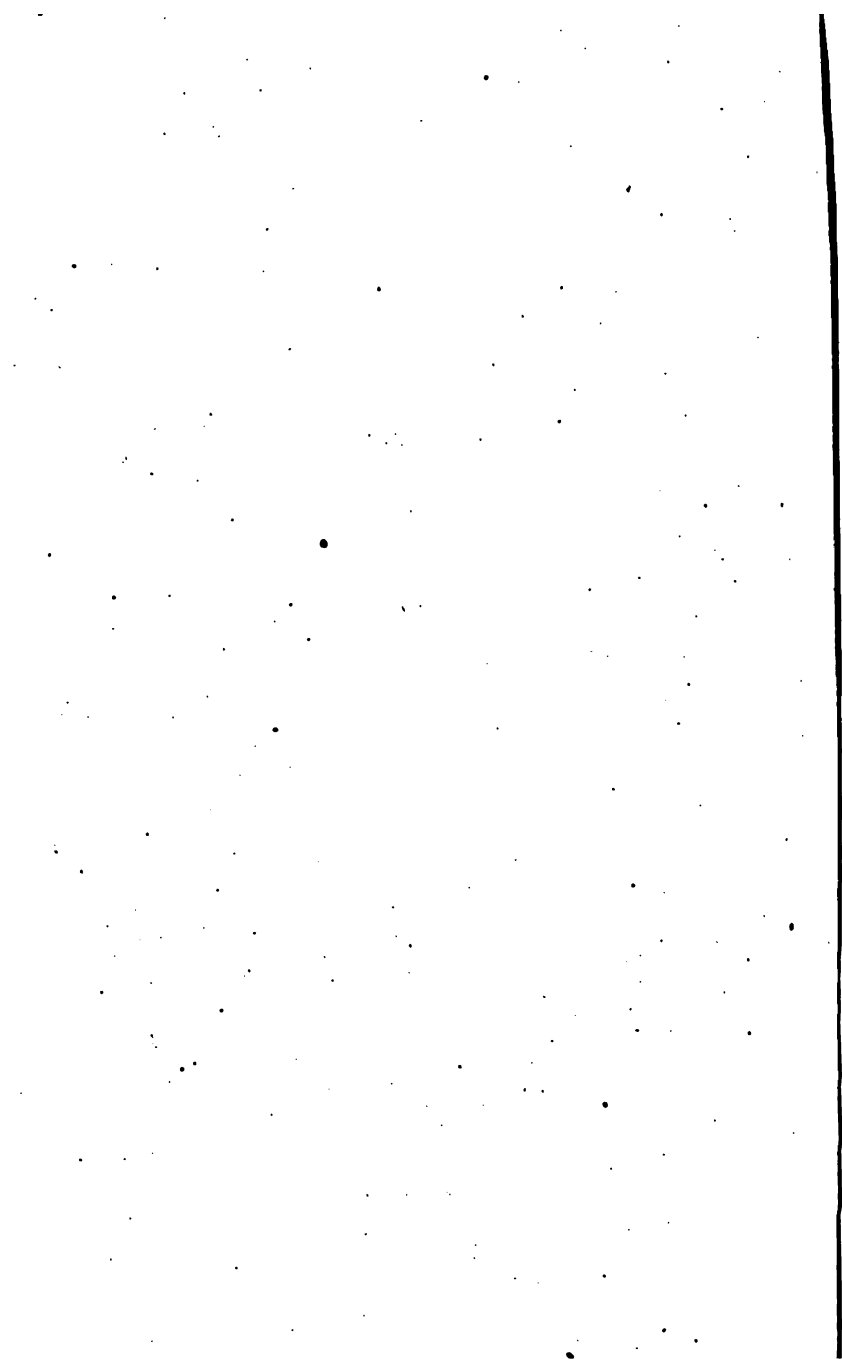
## BOOK IV.

### *LOST AND FOUND.*

‘C’est bien à l’amour qu’il en faut venir à toute époque, en toutes circonstances, en tout pays, tant qu’on veut chercher à comprendre pourquoi l’on vit, sans vouloir le demander à Dieu.’

PAUL DE MOLINES.







## CHAPTER I.

### WHAT CAN IT ALL MEAN?

‘There are seasons when to be still demands immeasurably higher strength than to act.’

CHANNING.

**I**T was towards the end of the year—some three months after the Dufferins had established themselves at Torquay for the winter—that Ralph received one day a letter from his publishers, which he deemed advisable to answer in person.

‘I shall kill two birds with one stone,’ he said to his mother, after he had read her the epistle. ‘I shall go up to town and see Hort myself, and then I can take

Marchmont on my way back. Oliver has been bothering me to go there for the last six weeks; and if I don't go soon I shall have to postpone my visit until the summer, for they move to Hyde Park Place after Christmas.'

'Then you won't stay with them long?'

'Not an hour longer than I can help, you may be sure of that. I don't anticipate a lively time at Marchmont, I can tell you. It will be Cosy, Cosy, Cosy, from morning till night. Oliver will discuss her all the evening, and Lady Lavinia all the morning. What a bore a friend in love does become—particularly when he happens to have been a bore before he fell in love! I do wish that Cosy would take a fancy to somebody else, and would break off this impossible engagement. That would be about the most satisfactory termination to this affair.'

'Perhaps,' replied Mrs. Dufferin, in a dubious tone. 'But might it not be a case of "out of the frying-pan into the fire?"—

to quote a homely phrase. I can't believe it possible that any choice of poor Cosy's would be a very wise one.'

If this speech sounds inconsistent, recalling Mrs. Dufferin's desperate infatuation for Miss Urquhart, we must remember that Ralph's mother was inconsistent—very inconsistent. She had rarely any just grounds for her views and opinions, and that, perhaps, was the reason of her changing them so often. She had liked Cosy chiefly because Cosy was so very, very pretty; but that is a kind of liking that does not stand the wear and tear of time and absence. Like all mere eye-love, it is bound to fade when the one who inspires it is out of sight. Mrs. Dufferin had not seen poor Averil's child for more than two years now, and during that period she had seen many other pretty faces, and she had also heard Cosy very much talked about. So although she defended her warmly at Ralph's bidding, and would have been ready at any moment to welcome her with open arms, she had

no great faith in Cosy's wisdom and discretion.

Lady Margaret disbelieved in the girl altogether. Mrs. Dufferin believed in her when she saw her, or when Ralph said she was to be believed in. But then, as we know, Lady Margaret influenced Ralph very strongly, and Ralph influenced his mother; and between the two influences poor Cosy's place in Mrs. Dufferin's esteem had become rather insecure.

Ralph's anticipations concerning his visit to Marchmont proved but too correct. It was a very dull one. Lady Lavinia bored him by talking about Miss Urquhart all the morning, and Oliver irritated him by talking of her all the evening.

Oliver's condition was becoming perfectly lamentable.

'He is duller than ever,' Ralph wrote Mrs. Dufferin; 'he never utters except when he is alone with me, or when he is talking City-shop with his father. I should feel very sorry for Lady Lavinia if she were

not so tiresome and ungenial herself. Oliver has quite left off quoting "my mother" on every occasion.'

And he did feel very sorry for Lady Lavinia one evening, when upon her asking her son 'to go and play something'—a rare act of condescension on her part, as she hated music, and had never permitted Oliver to learn when he was a boy (the few airs he knew he played by ear)—Oliver replied very surlily that he did not know anything to play.

'I've forgotten what I knew,' he said. '*You* made me give it up; and *music* is not to be put down and taken up again according to the caprice of the moment.'

The speech was not a polite one, and the way in which it was spoken was actually rude. Lady Lavinia turned scarlet. She never again asked Oliver to play; and the following day when Ralph tried to open the piano, he found it locked.

In bygone times, when Oliver was but a boy, Ralph had often asked the March-

monts to let him have a few lessons from a first-rate pianist. But this they had always refused, saying that they did not want to encourage his taste for music, that it was very apt to lead a young man into dissipated worldly society. Ralph had combated this opinion to the best of his ability, maintaining that the music that Oliver liked would only lead him to the Monday Pop's, and that he was moreover distinctly bound to cultivate the talent that God had given him. But to this opinion her ladyship had declined to subscribe. She had never heard anything at St. Mark's about cultivating a talent for music, and everything that was generally necessary to salvation she had heard there.

'And *she* was not going to be led out of the straight and narrow path by any of Ralph Dufferin's Broad Church notions,' she said.

Canon Rowe was duly informed of Ralph's heretical remark, and the Canon told her ladyship that self-culture was at best a Pagan virtue and not a Christian

duty—a speech that Lady Lavinia repeated to Mr. Dufferin in triumph.

‘Then what did the parable of the Ten Talents mean?’ inquired Ralph.

‘I don’t know,’ Lady Lavinia answered crossly, and looking rather shocked; ‘but it can’t mean anything about learning music, or it would not have been in the Bible.’

Of course, after that announcement, Ralph said no more on the disputed subject; but that little discussion that had taken place so many years before, recurred to him as he stood before the closed piano to-day.

‘How sequent life is!’ he thought. ‘There is not one broken link in the chain. Oliver is just the outcome of his bringing up. I might have inferred then what he would be now. Poor boy! if his childhood had been different, he might have had many sources of comfort and distraction now; whereas, as it is, he has but the one—money-making. I wonder if Canon Rowe considers that a Christian duty!’

Throughout that night, Ralph's sleep was haunted by dreams of Oliver. He fancied that he was at a concert at Exeter Hall, where Oliver was playing on the piano, and eliciting thunders of applause from an enthusiastic audience, composed entirely of Quakers, or rather of people in Quaker costume; for amongst this audience he discovered Cosy in a poke grey satin bonnet, and Jack in a shovel hat, and old Home and Madame de Senac seated side by side, dressed in that sober style of attire discarded by the Society of Friends some score of years ago. How subdued and demure was their costume! but how noisy their applause! And oh, would Oliver never finish thundering away at that piano! Surely he would break its strings!

'Ralph, wake up! Wake up, Ralph!' and from dreams of Oliver, Ralph awoke to find him standing by his bedside in an agony of excitement, a rare frame of mind for him. He had drawn back the curtains, and pulled up the blinds—which fully ac-

counted for the part the piano had played in the dream—and was now holding out a letter, which he was shouting to Ralph to ‘wake up and read.’ ‘It is from Cosy,’ he continued; ‘and I can’t quite make it out. What do you think of it? Ralph, *do* wake up and read it!’

Ralph turned lazily round, took the letter, read it, and was then forced to acknowledge that he could not make much out of it, beyond the fact that something more than usually unpleasant had occurred in the Urquhart household. The gist of the letter was to offer Oliver his freedom.

‘You had better forget me,’ wrote Cosy; ‘for you will soon be ashamed that you ever knew any of us.’ Then she referred vaguely to an ‘awfull trouble and disgraise’ hanging over them, and concluded by saying that ‘her heart was broken, and her life utterly blited.’ What did it al. mean? Ralph wondered. The more he thought over it, the more troubled and perplexed he felt, for Cosy was not

given to making too much of difficulties ; she was apt rather to underrate their importance. But this note was evidently penned in an hour of overwhelming sorrow, when the heart was faint and the hand weak.

Once or twice, while reading the letter, Ralph glanced up to look at Oliver who was leaning against the mantelpiece, and then the thought of what an awkward, unattractive young fellow he was to have gained any girl's fancy would obtrude itself upon Ralph. The temporary fit of excitement had passed, and the young banker looked as gloomy and stolid as usual.

'Her father and my parents have brought us to this, Ralph,' he said presently, in a hard dry tone. 'But on one point I'm determined. I'll brook their interference no longer. I'll run down to Ryde and marry Cosy with or without our parents' consent.'

He looked very dogged and obstinate as he spoke, and Ralph felt that this resolution must be nipped in the bud.

‘What about your promise to your father?’ he asked.

‘My father had no right to bind me by such a promise!’ cried Oliver hotly. ‘No other man was ever kept in leading-strings as I have been. The last few months have opened my eyes to the absurdity of my position. Why, here am I at six-and-twenty less my own master than are most boys of sixteen. But I will end this state of things soon, even if I have to go abroad and work for my own living. My parents have brought it upon themselves; they have only themselves to thank for it. I’ve been a good son, and led a different life to most other men, and this is my reward. The one thing I have ever asked for is refused me.’

All of which was perfectly true, and no one was better aware of it than Ralph was; but he was sorry to find that his young friend’s eyes were opened at last. It could not mend matters, and it might complicate them. Of course Ralph had foreseen all along that a day of awakening

must come sooner or later ; but he was none the less sorry that it had come—and at so painful a moment too. His parents' repressive system of education, their exacting demands, and his dull home, had robbed Oliver's youth of all joy and enthusiasm, and now threatened to rob his maturer years of hope and love.

It was a very hard case—very. But then what was to be done to alleviate it ? Ralph could think of no remedy. He could only hope that this unnatural bringing up might not result in a fierce reaction against the tyranny carried on in the name of religion, and that Oliver might not become, in his sorrow and despair, a reckless profligate, believing in neither God nor man.

'Or perhaps, if Cosy should give him up, he'll turn to fanaticism,' thought Ralph, as he watched Oliver standing there opposite to him, looking very determined and very wretched, his brows knit, and his lips compressed into one hard straight line. 'And then, with his money

and his influence, what a curse he will be to himself and to others! He is capable of any amount of bigotry; and his affection for Cosy is the only softness I have ever noted in him. He never had a pet of any kind; and I never saw him take the slightest notice of any children but Frank and Hardie. And that was merely for her sake. There never lived anyone so young and so untender. Young! He was born fifty, and he never knew the meaning of the word "tenderness" until he met Cosy. I don't think he knows much about it now—this is merely baffled passion.'

'Don't do anything rash, Oliver,' said Ralph, coolly. 'Better take the goods the gods provide you, and remain in Mincing Lane, at all events for the present. Of course I can quite understand that you are very much put out about this business. So am I! And I'll tell you what I'll do, if you like: I'll run over to Ryde for a day or two next week, interview Cosy, and let you know the result. And, in the meantime, don't worry yourself unnecessarily. Re-

member that all women, even the very best and the bravest, have a tendency to magnify evils, particularly on paper. Very likely Jack has been more odious than usual, Ryde cold and dull, and Cosy herself not feeling well. Hence these tears. Perhaps by the time I see her she will have forgotten this little outburst, and will laugh in my face when I ask what the tragedy was.'

But, although he spoke cheerfully to assure Oliver, Ralph himself felt by no means easy. Cosy never magnified evils, never wrote gloomy letters, and, indeed, never wrote at all if she could possibly avoid doing so. She would not have penned that letter if she had not felt that there was some dire necessity for so doing.

What that necessity might be, it behoved Ralph to ascertain; and with that end in view he left Marchmont early the following week, went up to town, got through part of his business, promised his publisher that he would call on him again in the course of a few days; and then, the

following morning, he started from Waterloo Station by an early train through a dense yellow fog.

When he reached Portsmouth it was snowing fast, and he had more than two hours to wait before the Ryde boat started: two weary, dreary hours with nothing on earth to do but to stare out of the hotel window reading the advertisements on the hoarding opposite, until at length he began to feel that the very undressed gentleman with Holman's Liver Pad hanging round his neck, and the little girl picking the fruit from which 'Eno's Salt' was to be extracted, must haunt him for the rest of his life.

At length, however, the two hours came to an end, his perusal of the advertisements was over, and he drove down to the pier and went on board, thinking as he did so of the last time that he made that crossing, when Oliver and Cosy witnessed his disembarkation.

Should he ever see those two standing together again, as they stood that day?

What a gap there seemed to be between that afternoon and this! Then it was August, and the fierce sun was beating down on Cosy's red-brown hair, making her soft cheek grow pale beneath his kisses, and lighting up her wonderful eyes till they shone with unwonted brilliancy. Now, the day was dark, and cold, and dreary, and the snow-wind was moaning like a woman in pain, and Cosy was probably sitting over the fire (or perhaps over no fire at all!) in that miserable little house of cards, Currall Cottage, bemoaning her wretched fate—or cursing it, perhaps: for she could be fierce at times, and doubtless she had had plenty to make her so lately.

‘I suppose that ruffian Jack has been up to some fresh devilry!’ Ralph muttered to himself for about the twentieth time, as the tram conveyed him and his portmanteau down the pier, now two inches thick in snow, and deposited them at the door of the hotel, which partook of the same forlorn, *out-of-season* appearance that characterised the whole place.



## CHAPTER II.

BOLTED.

‘Cet homme n’a point d’âme,  
C’est un monstre.’

V. HUGO.

**T**HE waiter who stepped forward to receive Ralph was the same man who had generally attended upon him when he stayed there in August with Oliver, and he now welcomed him with open arms.

‘Very glad to see you back again, sir.’

‘Thank you,’ replied Ralph, pleasantly.

‘But I’m afraid I cannot add that I am equally pleased to *be* back.’

‘Well, it is rather empty, sir—only six

people staying in the hotel now : never knew such a bad winter, sir.'

'I may as well see if I can't get something out of this fellow,' thought Ralph ; 'Jack's deeds are pretty well known, and the waiter may have heard something about him lately.'

Accordingly, whilst he was studying the *carte*, with a view to ordering dinner, Ralph began to put a question or two to the man :

'I suppose, that if the hotel is so empty the town is not very full—eh ?'

'Full, sir ? Oh dear no ! It's as hempty as can be.'

'Plenty of houses to let then, no doubt ?'

'To be had for the asking almost, sir.'

'Will Currall Cottage be for hire after Captain Urquhart leaves, do you know ?'

'Captain Urquhart has left.'

'Has left ?'

'Yes, sir ; didn't you know ?'

The man's tone seemed to say, 'Where *can* you have been living ?' Evidently

everyone in Ryde knew, and the waiter thought that Ralph ought to have known.

‘No ; I know nothing about it. When did they go?’

‘Last week. Bolted, sir!’ added the man in a mysterious key, lowering his tone. ‘The Captain went off one morning with Miss Urquhart and the boys, saying that he was just going to see his children off by the train to town, and that he and his daughter would be back in the evening. Why, he even ordered his dinner, sir, Mrs. Jackman told me: and they never came back—any of them.’

‘And where have they gone?’

‘Ah, sir, that is more than I can say. There are a good many in this place who would be much obliged to you if you could tell them.’

‘Then they left in debt?’

‘They do owe a pretty penny!’

‘I suppose that is why they bolted in such a hurry, eh?’

The man shook his head in a mysterious manner, and drew somewhat nearer.

'There's something else up, sir. *What*, I can't say—but there's something. About a fortnight or three weeks ago the Captain came back one day with a very ugly scar over his eye, and they did say that some gentleman had kicked him out of his house for being too attentive to that gentleman's daughter. What *Hi* say, sir, is that he was not the sort of customer to let *in* to any gentleman's house.'

Ralph was entirely of the waiter's opinion, and told him so. And when the man came to wait upon him at dinner, he asked him one or two more questions concerning the Currall Cottage party, inquiring more especially whether he had seen Miss Urquhart before she left.

'Yes, sir, I did. I saw her only a day or two before she left. She was coming off the pier with the little boys. She was looking thin and ill, sir; but very 'and-some, if I may say so. It went to my heart to see her look so poorly, for she was a very nice young lady. When they first came to Ryde, she'd often dine here.

Mr. Ripley was staying here then, and Lord Gravesend, and they used to give ladies' dinners. I've often pitied her, sir; for she is a lady, and many of her father's friends are not. The Captain had a very scratch pack lot about him. Those Penters, sir, were very fast people. But of course it is not for *me* to talk, sir. *We see nothing!*

'You seem to have seen and heard a good deal,' replied Ralph, with a laugh. 'But you don't know where Captain Urquhart has gone?'

'No, sir, I don't. To London, they say; but I should think he would go abroad again soon. He makes England rather too hot for him.'

In the evening the storm lifted a little. The snow ceased, and a few stars began to peep out through the rifts in the black shroud overhead; so, having nothing to do, and nothing to read, Ralph put on his ulster and sallied forth in the direction of Currall Cottage.

It was a bitterly cold night, freezing

hard—an evening for skating rather than walking ; and he soon found that he had set out on an expedition of actual danger. It was no joke, having to pick his steps carefully over the frozen snow, when his own limbs were stiff and numb with cold, and if he had not descried from afar a light in one of the cottage-windows, he would certainly have turned back before he commenced the ascent of the hill.

But, as it was, he determined to go through with it.

‘I may as well learn all I can whilst I am here,’ he said to himself, ‘for I shan’t spend an hour more than is absolutely necessary in this place. I’ll be off by the first boat to-morrow.’

His first ring at the bell met with no response of any kind. Then he rang again, louder than before ; and in a minute or two he heard a tremulous lachrymose voice from the window above call out :

‘Who are you? and what do you want?’

‘Well, if you’ll come down you’ll see,’

replied Ralph, who did not care to shout his name out for the benefit of the opposite neighbours.

But for some time the owner of the lachrymose voice would not come down. She was left alone in the house, she said ;— and was evidently afraid of burglars ; but at length Ralph contrived to inspire her with sufficient confidence to induce her to admit him, and a minute or two later he and the girl, whom he recognised as the maid-of-all-work who used to let him in when he called with Oliver, were standing together in the little room in which he had bidden farewell to Cosy on that last morning when he walked up to Currall Cottage to say good-bye.

‘ You don’t remember me ? ’ he began, by way of saying something to break the ice.

‘ No, sir, I don’t. ’

Ralph slipped half-a-crown into her dirty, crimson hand.

‘ I used to be up here sometimes last August. ’

'Such a many come up. I don't rec'llects them all.'

'So Captain and Miss Urquhart have left Ryde?'

'Yes, sir, they 'ave. And never a word o' warnin' to me that they was goin'. And Colonel and Mrs. Smith won't be back for another fortnight; and here am I left all alone in this 'ouse.'

'Why, you ought to be very much obliged to me then for coming up to pay you a visit,' said Ralph, laughing; 'instead of trying to bar me out.'

'I am very much obliged to you, sir,' replied the girl, looking at her half-crown; 'very much obliged indeed.'

'And I hope,' continued Ralph, 'that Captain Urquhart did not go away in your debt?'

'Indeed 'e did, sir. When he took this cottage for nine months from my rightful master, Colonel Smith, it was understood as 'ow 'e should pay me my wages—four pound a quarter. And 'e owes me four pound now.'

‘I’m very sorry to hear it.’

‘So you may be, sir. But not for four pounds, nor yet for four hundred pounds, sir, would I *hever* remain in the ’ouse with the Capting again. He was like a ragin’ bull of late, he was; his temper was that hawful! Poor Miss Cosy!’

‘Ah! and how was Miss Cosy?’

‘How could *hanybody* be who was in the ’ouse with that monster? She was ill, sir—*hill*, and un’appy. She’d sit in her room a-crying—a thing she never did at one time. Oh, lately she *did* change! They ’ad terrible rows, she and the Capting; all along o’ that Mrs. Penter, who warn’t no lady, and who the Capting would bring in of a hevening. I used to ’ave to go down and say as ’ow Miss Cosy was ill. And she were hill too—it was no fib; she were hill from bein’ worrited. And so was *Hi*!’

‘And they took all their luggage away with them, I suppose, as they did not mean to come back?’

‘Not heverythink, sir. Miss Cosy left a

hold cloak, and some boots, and her shepherd's-plaid suit behind her. I do believe she left 'em for me ; for she took all her smart fal-lals, which she wouldn't want any more than me.'

'I dare say she did leave them for you,' replied Ralph, gently ; 'for she was always kind and considerate.'

'That she were, sir. She was a hangel on earth ; and it's my belief that she'll soon be one in 'eaven. Good-evenin' to you, sir. Thank you very much, sir.'

Ralph walked away from the cottage, feeling a leaden weight of despondency at his heart. Had it come to that ? Was Cosy dying ? She so young, so beautiful——

'My God ! it can't be true ; it can't be true,' he said to himself.

But he felt that soon it would be true, if she were not transplanted, and quickly too, to a more genial soil. Jack Urquhart had killed his wife, and now he was killing his daughter. Why do some maintain that there are no monsters—that every man,

even the worst, has his redeeming point? Jack was a living contradiction to the theory. He was a monster, without heart, honour, or conscience; and Cosy must be taken from him.

So reasoned Ralph Dufferin, as he walked slowly back to the hotel through the snow-carpeted streets; and long before he reached his destination he had come to one conclusion, and formed one resolution: that Cosy must be taken away from her father, and given over to a husband's care. To Oliver, if his people would consent; but if they would not, why the sooner the engagement came to an end the better! Then she would be free to choose again.

'It will be hard upon Oliver,' thought Ralph; 'but it can't be helped. Necessity knows neither law nor pity; and that Cosy should marry, and soon too, is an absolute necessity. If she remains in her father's home she'll die.'



### CHAPTER III.

‘I WISH YOU WOULD SPEAK OUT.’

‘Il n’y a rien que la crainte et l’espérance ne persuadent aux hommes.’

VAUVENARGUES.

**T**HE following day Ralph returned to town. From Portsmouth Station he despatched a telegram to Mincing Lane, to ask Oliver to dine with him that evening at the ‘New Comers,’ where there was a strangers’ room; and then he devoted the remainder of the day to the business he had postponed until his return from the Isle of Wight. It was only just half-past seven when he drove up to the Club, but he found

his guest already there, and waiting for him.

Oliver received the news of the Urquharts having bolted from Ryde with more equanimity than Ralph had anticipated, which was partly due to the fact of his having at once made up his mind that they must be in London, and that he should soon find them out, and partly to his resolution (that had strengthened during Ralph's absence) of marrying Cosy, in spite of his promise to his father, as soon as ever they did meet. And this resolution nothing that Ralph might say could combat. Not that he said much: he was feeling too tired; and after he had related the story of the 'hugly scar,' and the flight from the island, he relapsed into silence, and Oliver followed suit.

It was as much as Ralph could do to keep awake during that dinner. Coming up in the train he had been full of pity for Oliver, but directly he saw him the compassion vanished, and a more contemptuous feeling took its place. Oliver's presence

had the knack of dispelling pity, just as the sight of Cosy awakened it. Looking at him, and listening to him, Ralph began to think that anything that prevented Cosy's union with such an oaf ought to be looked upon rather in the light of a mercy.

'If there were only any other alternative than remaining with Jack,' he said to himself, as he rose from the dinner-table to light his cigar.

Oliver insisted upon walking back with his host to the Great Western Hotel, where the latter was staying, and during his walk he began again to talk of Cosy, and of his fixed determination to marry her sooner or later; and Ralph clearly foresaw that for the future this would be the young banker's sole topic of conversation when they were *tête-à-tête*.

'Ah well! it is a great pity,' said Ralph presently, when the sharp frosty air had fairly roused him, and dispelled his weary mood, which was at once succeeded by the irritability that is the frequent ac-

companiment of over-fatigue; 'it is a great pity. There is no greater mistake than that hankering after the unattainable, and imagining that life is over for us because we cannot share it with some one person, who in nine cases out of ten would not add so very much to our happiness.'

'Cosy does not add to my happiness,' said Oliver; 'she simply makes it. Without her I am wretched. I am not like some men who have had a dozen fancies. I've never cared for anyone but her.'

'We've all said that about somebody or other at some time of our lives. I said it once about a woman nearly old enough to be my mother. I am very glad now that she is not my wife.'

'You and I are different people, Dufferin. I cannot, what you call, *get over* things.'

There was a tinge of grim sadness in the oaf's tone now. But it irritated Ralph more than it touched him.

'That's a pity,' he said coolly; 'for life is made up of that same getting over

things. It is not a proof of inconstancy, but of progress.'

'I could never change towards Cosy,' said Oliver, doggedly. 'It is simply impossible.'

'Supposing she were to change?'

'I am only speaking for myself. I said that I could never change.'

'Or supposing you were to meet her again under altered circumstances, and to find that she was quite different to what you had believed her to be—an altered being. Then she would no longer be the Cosy Urquhart with whom you had fallen in love.'

'Still I should never love anybody else. I know you mean very kindly, Dufferin, but it is of no use giving this sort of advice to me. I'd marry Cosy to-morrow, though I did not know where our next shilling was to come from.'

'And do you think she would marry you under those circumstances?' Ralph asked the question in a tone of biting sarcasm.

'Yes. You don't, evidently.'

Ralph shrugged his shoulders.

'Who can say? Woman is a mystery. But if she did marry you under such circumstances, I should say that she was insane, and you utterly selfish; and that you would both be deservedly unhappy.'

'Of course you think like that because you are worldly, and you have always lived amongst worldly people. I could be perfectly happy, poor, with her. Riches don't bring happiness.'

'If you think that, I wonder you devote so much time to money-making,' yawned Ralph. 'You can't say that you do it for Cosy's sake, because you did it before you ever set eyes on her. And remember—when you talk so glibly about marrying into poverty—how do you suppose Miss Urquhart will like the prospect?'

'Cosy has known poverty,' said Oliver, catching at a straw.

'Humph! Yes! From time to time; but in the intervals she has known comfort, and even luxury, *and a great deal of amusement.*'

Oliver winced at the sound of that word.

'A great deal of amusement,' Ralph repeated; 'and Cosy cannot live without amusement.'

Oliver turned quickly round.

'Ralph, I don't believe you want us to marry. I wish you would say so at once, and not lead us on to think that you are standing our friend, when all the time you are holding my parents' views on this subject. What do you want? What do you think about the matter? I wish you would speak out.'

Ralph was amused rather than annoyed at this outburst.

'I have spoken out,' he said; 'only you will neither hear nor understand. It is you who have wilfully closed your ears, not I who have not spoken sufficiently plainly. What I feel about the matter is this: I think that you and Cosy are pre-eminently unsuited to each other; but that is your affair, not mine. If you were rich, and free to marry her, I should say,

"Marry her to-morrow, and take her away from Jack." But you are not free to do so; your hands are tied by your promise to your father, and still more by his refusal to consent to the marriage, and therefore I say, "Give her up." There is nothing to wait for—no hope, no chance of your father relenting; and to bind Cosy to an engagement which you cannot fulfil is simply cruel to a girl in her position. Now you know exactly what I think on the matter: I think that the marriage is impossible, and that if it could and did take place, it would not conduce either to your happiness or to hers. But all the same, I consider that your father is treating you very badly, and I have told your mother so; and I have done my utmost to induce her to accede to your wishes in the matter of this marriage. But I have failed, as you know.'

They had reached the Great Western by this time. At the entrance Ralph paused, and held out his hand:

'Good - night, Marchmont. Don't be

offended at my frank speaking. Remember you asked for it. I feel that you are looking upon me as a prophet of evil to-night. And, after all, I may be mistaken—your father may relent.'

'I don't think it is likely,' groaned Oliver. 'When Cosy and I marry'—he would not say 'if we marry;' he wished Ralph to consider their eventual union a certainty—'we shall have to marry, I know, without the consent of our parents.'

His tone was very gloomy, but not with sorrow at the parental obduracy. What troubled him now was that remark of Ralph's, 'I think that you and Cosy are pre-eminently unsuited to each other.' It haunted him. He could not forget it. All the way back to Hyde Park Place, where he was going to spend the night at the family mansion, it rang in his ears. He heard it the last thing before he fell asleep, and the sound of it seemed to wake him in the morning, recalling to him in some strange way the sensations he had experienced when he received and read

Cosy's first letter. Was it that her unsuitability to him had dawned upon him even then ? No, he would not think it ; he could not bear to think it. He stifled the warning whispers as if they had been suggestions from the evil one. He was an adept at stifling the voice of the inward monitor whenever she whispered a doubt. He had learnt that it was a duty so to do in matters theological, and he applied the principle to other questions.

' On peut se faire un mal irréparable avec ses propres pensées,' a great French writer has said. He might have added that one may sometimes do one's self a still greater injury by discouraging thought.





## CHAPTER IV.

### A DISCARDED PHOTOGRAPH.

‘Le temps calme les ivresses ; . . . une longue fidélité a ses dernières admirations.’

JOUBERT.

**A**T about eight o'clock the following evening Ralph arrived at Torquay ; and half an hour later he drove up to the door of his mother's villa.

‘I hope Mrs. Dufferin has not waited dinner for me,’ were his first words to the servant who came out to meet him.

‘Mrs. Dufferin is dining out, sir,’ replied the man ; and then he added something else which Ralph did not catch, for

he had hurried on into the house, and was now examining the letters that had come for him during the day, and which were lying on the hall-table.

The drawing-room door, which faced the entrance, stood open ; and upon looking towards it, Ralph was surprised to see a blaze of light within, and a shadow flitting across the wall. Gathering up his letters he passed on, meaning to read them in comfort by the fireside ; when, to his astonishment, he discovered that the shadow on the wall was not cast by one of the servants, as he supposed, but by a young lady who was sitting on the crimson hearthrug, knitting, with a sky-terrier in her lap.

It was a very pleasant picture to greet a man on his return home, Ralph thought ; doubly pleasant when the man in question had come off a long railway journey, and had just shut the door on an outer world of slush, rain, half-melted snow, and all the other disagreeable accompaniments of a thaw. The girl looked so handsome, and

at the same time so pleasant, and comfortable, and home-like. Now Cosy was always, to Ralph's thinking, like a Kohinoor diamond amongst women. Her setting was unworthy of her ; but still she was a brilliant of the first water. Far too beautiful for use or daily wear ! That was one of his objections to her marrying Oliver. Oliver would not know what to do with so rare a gem. But this girl who was kneeling on the hearthrug was no peerless beauty who you felt ought to be surrounded by an escort whenever she took her walks abroad, or only permitted to show herself on her balcony at stated times, like Pauline de Vigiueres. She was just a sweet, innocent-looking, loyal-hearted young English-woman—a girl whose gentle soul you could read in her soft brown eyes—who was as simple as nature, and as transparent as a running brook ; but who was also both reticent and reserved when the occasion required, and who was at all times encased with a triple armour of innocence, modesty, and self-respect.

As Ralph stood in the doorway shading his eyes with his hand—the glare of light, after his long dark drive, seemed to half blind him—and trying to make out who the stranger could be, she suddenly sprang to her feet, and held out a large but very white hand to welcome him.

‘You don’t know me, I do believe!’

Directly she spoke he did.

‘Why, Agnes! What an unexpected pleasure! And are you here alone, and my mother gone out? How inhospitable of her! What does it all mean? Tell me.’

‘It means just this: that we met your mother this morning as we were looking for apartments, and that she insisted on our coming to stay here instead of going into lodgings. We were, of course, only too happy to accept her invitation; and to-morrow, or the next day, we go house-hunting, for we mean to pitch our roving-tent at Torquay until May.’

‘Delightful! we have this villa until the middle of April, so I hope you’ll pitch the roving-tent close by. But you haven’t

told me yet why you are here alone. Where is my mother? and yours?

'They are dining at Lady Fall's. We were all three invited, but I asked to be excused.'

'Why?' inquired Ralph, hoping that she would say that she had stayed at home to welcome him, and thinking that Cosy would have done so in her place.

'Why? oh! because "I do not like you, *Lady Fall*;" that is the only reason why. And I do not like dining quietly with people I dislike. It seems so mean and so dishonest. Big parties are different; but when one accepts an invitation to a quiet family-party, I think it ought to imply that your hosts are your friends.'

'I think so too; especially as you and I are about to dine quietly together.'

Agnes laughed a low gentle laugh, very clear, but very soft; and Ralph thought what a pleasant sound it made in the quiet firelit room.

Their *tête-à-tête* dinner went off capitally.

They had much to discuss, both then and later, when they sat together in the study after dinner, sipping their coffee out of some pretty little Kaga cups that Ralph had sent down the previous week from Jamrack's. There were all the details of Madge's wedding to hear—Madge had married, the previous week, the eldest son of the Bishop of Tiverton, a young gentleman with independent means and a good living, whom Mrs. Madge intended to rule in a ladylike, unobtrusive, but very determined manner, just as Lady Margaret ruled *her* husband.

The Sheridan family were divided—as they say the human race is—into rulers and ruled. Lady Margaret and Madge were the rulers, Mr. Sheridan and Agnes the ruled. One is always bridled and saddled, the other booted and spurred, the old proverb tells us. It is an open question which is the happier condition of the two.

'How is your pretty friend Miss Urquhart?' Agnes asked suddenly.

'I wish I knew—poor child!' replied

Ralph. 'I've lost sight of her, I'm sorry to say.'

'Is she still engaged to young Marchmont?'

'After a fashion. He is still desperately in love with her; but her people continue to withhold their consent.'

'And a good thing too.'

'Why?'

'She would be wretched with him. A girl brought up as she has been could not give in to the Marchmont way of living. It is impossible—out of the question! Why, many quite sober-minded girls would be frightened at the dulness of such a prospect.'

'Come, come, Agnes! Oliver is not a bad boy. Don't run him down. He is a great friend of mine.'

With more than three hundred miles between them, Ralph felt almost enthusiastic about Oliver Marchmont. Moreover, he was this evening in that frame of mind in which a man thinks well of most people.

‘ I have no doubt he is very nice,’ replied Agnes, meekly ; ‘ but all the same, Miss Urquhart would not be happy with him, for she doesn’t care about him.’

‘ How can you tell ?’

‘ I know it.’

‘ Well, then, you are wrong. Cosy tells me she is devoted to Oliver.’

‘ She does not speak the truth—— We have said all this before, Ralph.’

‘ We have. You seem to know Miss Urquhart’s affairs better than she knows them herself, Agnes. Now, tell me, why do you maintain that she is indifferent to Oliver ?’

‘ Because she loves somebody else.’

There was no mamma entering this time to prevent Ralph having the full effect of this announcement, and upon hearing it he opened his eyes wide in amazement :

‘ Son nom, mademoiselle ?’

But Agnes had no intention of giving up the name, and she positively declined to do so. And then it suddenly flashed across Ralph that this girl very

probably suspected Cosy of entertaining a hopeless passion for Lord Aubrey Littledale. He had often observed that when a girl was in love with a man herself, she believed that every other woman must be equally infatuated about him. But it annoyed him all the same to find that his companion was not an exception to the rule. She was an exception to so many of the rules that apply to ordinary young ladyhood—she was so unselfish, so upright, so free from vanity, artifice, and artificiality—that he did not like to find any flaw in her character. But she was jealous—undeniably jealous—jealousy being, by-the-bye, the fault of many women who have few other failings.

Ralph Dufferin had a talent for inspiring confidence, and a passion for receiving it from those in whom he took an interest. And to-night he began to wish that Agnes Sheridan would say something to him about Lord Aubrey Littledale. But nothing was less likely, he feared. She was not the kind of girl to do so. Cosy

Urquhart would have told him anything and everything—save that one secret—about herself or anybody else ; and it was just this entire lack of reticence which (although it was not without its charm for him) prevented his ever being in love with her. He had seen her too often *en peignoir* ; morally, mentally, and physically. So, too, had Oliver perhaps ; but then to Oliver the situation had the charm of novelty. Cosy was the first perfectly frank, fearless, unconventional young lady he had ever known. And novelty has a peculiar attraction of its own.

Presently, when the conversation flagged for a minute or two, Ralph began to turn over the leaves of an album that lay on the table in front of him. It was Agnes Sheridan's ; and had been given to her, as he gathered from the title-page, during the previous winter in Rome, 'on her twenty-first birthday, from her affectionate mamma.'

'Don't you remember dining with us that evening ?' Agnes asked. 'You ought

not to forget, for you and your dear mother gave me these lovely pins.'

Ralph remembered perfectly. He also remembered that Aubrey Littledale had been of the party, and that the following week the young *attaché* had left Rome and returned to Paris, soon after which Agnes was laid low with an attack of fever.

'Yes, I recollect,' replied Ralph; 'and I also recollect that I never saw you from that evening until we met in town last August. When I called on your mother a day or two after your birthday you were out; and when we came to say good-bye you were ill in bed with Roman fever.'

'Ah, that was a terrible time!' sighed Agnes. 'How ill I was! and how anxious poor mamma and Margaret were!'

'They were not the only people who were anxious about you, Agnes. Mother and I continued to receive daily bulletins from Madge for more than a fortnight.'

'Yes, I know how kind you were,' said

Agnes, her soft brown eyes filling with tears. 'It always fills me with a sense of my own unworthiness, when I remember how anxious so many dear good people were about me then.'

'It might rather fill you with a sense of your own preciousness,' said Ralph, gently. 'Only the best people are generally the least aware of their own worth.'

'Ah! you must not say that,' exclaimed Agnes, looking up at him through a mist of tears. 'I was never less worthy or more useless than just at that time.'

The words seemed to escape her almost unintentionally; and when she had uttered them Ralph crossed over, and came and sat down on the sofa beside her.

'Agnes, I have known you ever since you were a child of five. I'm old enough to be your father. I wonder if you could feel sufficient confidence in me to tell me something.'

'What?'

He opened the album. On the second page, dedicated to people she had met in

Rome, one photograph had been hastily torn out—so hastily, that its little gilt frame had been injured.

‘Why was that portrait discarded?’

Agnes was silent.

‘Why?’ Ralph repeated.

‘Because it was foolish to keep——’

‘The portrait of a dead love,’ said Ralph, finishing the sentence for her.

‘A souvenir of a bygone folly, say rather,’ exclaimed poor Agnes, bitterly. ‘Oh, Ralph, don’t let us talk about this. I never speak of it to anyone.’

‘Nay, nay, let us talk about it this once, and then we will never recur to it again. When did you tear Littledale’s portrait out of your book?’

‘At Spa.’

‘Why?’

‘Because I wished to forget him altogether.’

‘What had he done to deserve that?’

‘*He* had not done anything exactly. It was all my own fault, Ralph. I know that. But one day I lost my scent-bottle—that

dark red one that you have so often seen in my hand—and two days later it was returned to me by a servant, with a note from Madame de Senac, saying that she had picked it up in church. I always shall believe, Ralph, that she stole it from me.'

'Very likely, my dear.'

"And that fortunately the stopper had not been broken by the fall," the note went on to say.'

'What did she mean?'

Agnes turned crimson.

'Why, when I was only fifteen, I had that bottle made for me by a working jeweller. It had a double opening, and space for a portrait inside the stopper, which, in fact, was fashioned like a locket.'

'Ah! I see,' said Ralph, who had risen, and was standing in front of the fire, intent, apparently, upon counting the blue rings of smoke that were fading into thin air before his eyes: 'I see.'

'And oh, Ralph, I have fretted so about it all. It was that, and not the effects of

Roman fever, that I could not get over at Spa. Suppose she told—*him*—that I carried his portrait about with me !

‘ I don’t suppose she did anything of the kind,’ remarked Ralph, calmly.

‘ Don’t you ?’ cried Agnes, joyfully.

‘ No, indeed I don’t.’

‘ Why not ?’

Ralph was silent for a moment. Then he answered her :

‘ Littledale is a very good fellow in many respects, Agnes ; but he is a very vain one, and more open to flattery than anybody of my acquaintance. He is a man who loves because he is first loved. *That* flatters his *amour propre*. Unfortunately, he has fallen into the hands of a woman who does not really care for him, but who has made him believe that she does. Hence her hold over him. She has no other.’

‘ I think he must be fond of her,’ put in Agnes ; ‘ he is always with her.’

Ralph shook his head.

‘ He is not fond of her. She is too

grasping. She has got too much out of him. No man likes that, however liberal and generous he may be. Littledale was quite ready to give Madame de Senac anything or everything she could wish ; but it was not pleasant to find her so anxious to seize it. But to return to what I was about to say, she knows him and his weaknesses too well not to keep from him the fact of any good charming young girl liking him ; it would have been signing her own death-warrant. Her reign would soon be over then.'

Agnes heaved a sigh of relief :

'You have lifted a load of shame and misery from my heart.'

'Don't speak like that,' said Ralph, somewhat sharply. 'There is no shame in the case. And don't talk, even to yourself, about having been in love with Littledale. What could a child of your age—how old did you say you were? fifteen?—know about love? Love!—you never loved him! You merely admired his handsome face, as everybody must do.'

‘Yes ; I suppose it was that,’ murmured Agnes, very shamefacedly.

The dream was over. It had taken her some time to awaken from it ; but it *was* over, and she was not likely to dream it again. Next time her dream would be about somebody else. Lord Aubrey had made her suffer terribly, cruelly ; but she had no bitter feeling towards him. She had no bitter feeling this evening towards anyone. She was even beginning to pity her old rival almost as much as she had disliked her.

There was a certain heroine of romance, Grasdasilée, a *merle blanc* of her sex, for she loved to martyrdom a knight who loved another, and she had not even the courage to resent the slight—quite the contrary ! She died true to her unrequited love—a virgin—did this lady ! Nevertheless, we have met many of her descendants in real life, and in fiction.

Agnes Sheridan was one of them. She had loved Lord Aubrey to martyrdom ; but she had only wept over his indiffer-

ence. She had never attempted to avenge her slighted love.

Just as Agnes was assenting to Ralph's announcement that she had never really cared for Aubrey Littledale, a loud ring was heard at the door-bell.

'Ralph! Ralph!' she cried, starting to her feet; 'I want to say something to you before anybody comes in. You will never tell anybody one word of—of what we have been saying, will you? And you will try and forget it, won't you, Ralph? I was so young then, and——'

'Where did you say they were, Lucas? In the library? All right. *This* way, dear Lady Margaret!'

'All the same, Agnes,' Ralph was saying, when the two mothers entered the room, 'that blank space in your album is very unsightly, so I am going to fill it with one of my new vignettes, if you will allow me. Well, dear ladies, have you had a pleasant evening?'



## CHAPTER V.

FLAWES V. URQUHART.

‘A gracious possession for ever.’

LOWELL.

**F**OR some weeks after Ralph's return to Torquay, he heard nothing of Oliver, and nothing either of or from Cosy until one morning he came down to breakfast and found his mother half-weeping over the *Times*.

‘What is the matter?’ he asked, as he stooped down to kiss her.

‘Oh, Ralph! those poor children! Poor, poor little Cosy!’

‘Cosy!’ cried Ralph, seizing the paper;

‘what is the matter with her? She is not——’

No ; she was not dead ! Only a fresh sorrow had befallen her ; a new shame had overshadowed her path. Jack was in a scrape again ; the worst, it seemed, that even he had ever fallen into.

And as Ralph read all the revolting details of the case, headed ‘Breach of Promise : Flawes *versus* Urquhart,’ it made him furious to think that there was no law to compel such a father to resign the guardianship of his offspring. He thought of the little Munroes, Lord Aven-tayle’s brothers, in the carefully guarded sanctity of their home, not even being allowed to know what a bad relation they possessed ; and then he thought of those unhappy children of poor Averil’s, who would doubtless hear the whole case discussed with all its unedifying circumstances by ‘papa’ and ‘papa’s friends.’ For Jack had no respect for youth and innocence, and was like an Italian in his indifference to what he said before his daughter.

Ralph could understand now the kind of fascination, or rather attraction, that the attentions of a man like Oliver Marchmont might have had for Cosy. It must have been so new, so strange to her to be treated with the prim deference and respect that Oliver showed to women *as women*, whether they were washerwomen or duchesses. Until he had met Cosy he had rather looked upon members of the gentler sex as beings to be kept at a distance ; although at a most polite distance. And Miss Urquhart, who had been sated with flattery and compliments, had met with very little real courtesy, and still less deference or respect, until she made the acquaintance of Oliver Marchmont. Viewed in the light of to-day's revelations, the ' devotion ' was intelligible.

' How the clubs will talk of it ! ' said Ralph, as he poured himself out a cup of coffee ; ' and the boudoirs too—eh, mother ? No wonder handsome Jack returned to Ryde that evening with a " hugly scar " over his eye ! '

‘And what will the Marchmonts say?’ sighed Mrs. Dufferin.

‘Oh, they’ll be delighted.’

‘My dear Ralph, don’t say that!’

‘No! well, I’ll do Lady Lavinia justice. I don’t think she will be delighted; she does not rejoice in evil, although she does in fault-finding; but John Oliver will triumph down to the very depths of his narrow heart. I only hope he will be guarded in what he says before Oliver. It would not take a great deal to make the boy kick over the traces altogether. Oh, don’t look alarmed! I don’t mean that he will go to the bad in any way. But he will break away from his parents altogether shortly, if they don’t look out.’

‘What do you think he will do?’

‘Marry Cosy if he can—if she will have him—and support her by his own exertions, if his father won’t help them.’

‘Poor, dear Lady Lavinia!’

‘My dear mother, I don’t pity her very much. She *will* fly in the face of God and of nature, and she must take the con-

sequences. She *must* learn to accept the fact that her son is no longer a child, and that a man has a right to decide certain questions for himself.'

'But you see, Ralph, she is very unhappy, and terribly disappointed. She never thought that Oliver could have wished to make such a marriage. And being unhappy and disappointed, she finds it difficult to forgive the son who is causing her this sorrow and disappointment.'

'Then if she cannot forgive one who has *involuntarily* caused her trouble—one, too, whom she professes to love—I think she had better leave off being so boastful about her religion, and cease to call herself a Christian. But, after all, I don't think she does call herself that—she calls herself an Evangelical.'

'She would forgive Oliver if he repented; she says so.'

'That is nonsense. What has he to repent of? he has committed no sin in engaging himself to Cosy. His parents may think he made a mistake, perhaps

I do too ; but if they cannot forgive that, they are simply denying the lessons of nature, and of history, and of human life. I dare say Mr. John Oliver Marchmont has a thing or two to be forgiven him. If he hasn't, he is very different to most City men ; and I've not discovered that his business morals differ very much from those of his brethren. I take it, from what I know of the two, that Oliver is a more conscientious man than his father, and I hope he will never become so odious.'

' Ah, Ralph, you are a model friend, and you always take the part of the absent !'

' I don't always take Oliver's part, whether he happens to be absent or present. I do, when it is a question of looking at his conduct from his parents' point of view, for they are treating him very badly. Of course this engagement is a great mistake. We all know that. He is miserably unsuited to Cosy, and she to him ; and they would make each other wretched. But they would both have found it out if they had been allowed to see more of each other,

instead of being torn apart, as they were. If Lady Lavinia had had any *nous* or discretion, she would have invited Miss Urquhart to Marchmont for a couple of months, telling her that she could not listen to any idea of engagement until she and Oliver knew each other better. If that had not brought the affair to a speedy conclusion I don't believe that anything would. You may depend upon it that at the end of a fortnight poor little Cosy would have fled, leaving her engagement-ring behind her !

‘Ralph, you are very cynical,’ said Mrs. Dufferin, reproachfully. ‘I am very glad that Mr. Marchmont did not hear that speech ; he always complains that you are cynical.’

‘And I complain that he is hypocritical and ridiculous. But I believe that he brings a great many other charges against me. He doesn't like me, I know. My friend at the Marchmont Court is Lady Lavinia : she is rather in love with me.’

‘Mr. Marchmont thinks that you should have entered some profession.’

‘I have.’

‘Ah! but he doesn’t consider literature a profession.’

‘I’m quite sure he wouldn’t if he had to live by it.’

Then the conversation came to an end; and after breakfast Ralph told his mother that he intended running up to town for a night or two, ‘just to see how matters were going on,’ he said, ‘which meant, she knew, to look after Cosy if he could, and to keep an eye upon Oliver.’

On his way to the station Ralph overtook Agnes Sheridan walking with her German maid—a young person whom Lady Margaret insisted upon retaining in her service on account of her inability to acquire the English tongue, ‘which made her such a good sort of person to be about the girls, you know; obliged them to keep up their German:’ an opinion in which Ralph fully concurred this morning as he jumped out of his fly, and joined Agnes in

the happy consciousness that Crescenz was, to all intents and purposes, deaf and dumb.

'Are you going away?' asked Miss Sheridan, with an unmistakable touch of apprehension in her voice; and looking towards the portmanteau that in effect made the question superfluous.

'I am for a few days,' replied Ralph, cheerfully.

His companion's evident trouble had rather an exhilarating effect upon him.

'And is it Mr. Hort who calls you this time? I hope so; for mamma and I are looking forward to a sequel to "Hoswith."'

'Ah! I am afraid you won't see that just at present. No, it is not Mr. Hort, but my poor little friend Miss Urquhart who calls me away this time.'

The Flawes case was not one that Ralph could discuss with Agnes Sheridan; but he hinted to her that Captain Urquhart had been behaving rather worse than usual, and that he—Ralph—was anxious to know how the poor children were faring in the fray.

Agnes's face clouded over again. She was a very good-hearted girl, with compassion written on every line of her sweet blushing face; a girl to whom even strangers would turn to appeal for sympathy, knowing instinctively that she had it to give, and that she would find it both easy and pleasant to give it. But she was also, as I have said before, a jealous girl; and she did not like to hear Ralph express this deep interest in Cosy Urquhart. She was very angry with herself for feeling so annoyed, but she could not overcome the annoyance. She was well aware of her besetting sin, and she did try to conquer it. But jealousy is a plant that strikes its roots very deep in a loving nature, and the very heart's fibres are apt to quiver with agony in any attempt to uproot it.

'Averil Urquhart's children are very dear to me, you know,' said Ralph presently, in a somewhat explanatory tone.

'I can quite understand that,' replied Agnes, her pure voice quivering with the pain that she fancied she was concealing

so well; 'for she was your first love, people say.'

'Then "they say so" is more than "half a liar" in this case,' said Ralph. 'I was never in love with Averil. I never liked her as well as I do Cosy, and I am not in love with *her*. My first love was a German lady—no, she was not in the least like your attendant—she was tall, and dark, and nearly twenty years older than myself; and when I was torn away from her, I fancied that I was going to die. At nineteen one does fancy that love-sorrows kill, Agnes. My second love was poor Adeline Ferrars, who died at Naples ten years ago; died as I was hastening to her to tell her how much I cared for her. And my third and last love, Agnes, is— Agnes, don't turn your face away. I cannot bear talking to a listener who will not look at me.'

Then Agnes turned and looked up at him. And athwart her tears, and the wintry sunlight, she seemed to see the gates of Paradise re-open.



## CHAPTER VI.

FOUND.

‘La conscience, l’honneur, et l’estime des hommes  
est à prix d’argent.’

VAUVENARGUES.

**U**PON his arrival in town, Ralph drove at once to No. —, Furnival’s Inn, where was to be found the office of Mr. Bentham, the lawyer employed in Jack Urquhart’s defence, and from him Ralph asked for the defendant’s address, mentioning at the same time that he was an old family friend.

Mr. Bentham replied very civilly that he could not inform Mr. Dufferin of Captain Urquhart’s whereabouts, but that his letters

were always sent to the —, naming a third-rate sporting club south of the Strand, whither Ralph at once repaired, to learn from the porter, a seedy-looking person, that Captain Urquhart had not been to the club for some time, but that he sent every day for his letters or parcels —generally about that hour.

While they were talking a cabman came in, and asked in a hoarse gin voice if there were 'hanything for Captain Urquhart?'

Quick as thought Ralph left the house, and walked out into the street, where, about a hundred yards lower down, a four-wheeler was to be seen, in the depths of which, muffled up to the eyes, sat Jack, evidently wishing to escape notice.

Ralph pretended not to see him, and began walking slowly towards the Strand; but when he looked back, after a minute or two, he saw 'the Capting' tearing down the street, and the cabman standing by the door of his vehicle, gazing at the palm of his own hand with the air of a man who

sees therein something calculated to inspire both anger and disgust.

After a moment of silence, the anger and disgust found vent in words :

‘ You calls yourself a gen’man, do you ?’ he roared out after Jack. ‘ I don’t !’

Ralph walked up to the man :

‘ I think I saw you just now, in the —— Club, asking for Captain Urquhart’s letters ?’

‘ Maybe you did. Another time he may ask for them hisself.’

Ralph slipped a two-shilling piece into the man’s hand :

‘ Perhaps you know where Captain Urquhart lives ?’

‘ No, I don’t, sir,’ replied the cabman, civilly ; the money having produced a most mollifying effect upon his voice and manner. ‘ All I knows is that I picked him up near Thurloe Square. ‘ E’s one o’ those as ud like to be served for nothink, ‘ e’is. ‘ E thinks a good lot o’ ‘ imself. I shouldn’t like to buy ‘ im at ‘ is price and sell ‘ im at mine. But, look ‘ ere, sir, I

*fancies* as 'ow 'e lives somewhere down Brompton way. I stands near the Horatry, and I often sees 'im pass. Now, sir, do you call this a proper fare to give me for bringin' 'im 'ere from Thurloe Square—one and fourpence; and 'ere we are close to Temple Bar.'

'Well now, listen to me,' said Ralph quietly, trying to stem the torrent of the injured driver's eloquence, 'if you can find out for me exactly where Captain Urquhart lives, I'll give you five shillings.'

'All right, sir. Look on it as done. But 'ow am I to let you know?'

Ralph handed him his card.

'I'm staying at Parish's. Call there when you have anything to tell me; and if I'm not in, ask for my servant.'

'All right, sir.'

Two days later, as Ralph was entering the hotel, after a most depressing lunch with Oliver in the City, he saw his friend the cabman standing before the door, having an interview with Leopold.

Both appeared somewhat relieved when

Ralph came up, as they had evidently failed to make themselves very intelligible to one another.

‘Monsieur, je ne comprends pas précisément,’ Leopold was beginning, when the driver cut him short.

‘I was just tellin’ this ’ere young man, sir, as ’ow this is the address you wants.’

And he held out Ralph’s own card, on the back of which was written in pencil:

‘Urkurt — Captin, No. —, Sydney Street, Fulham Road. Foster.’

Ralph thanked the man, sent Leopold indoors, and then asked what ‘Foster’ meant.

‘It is the name ’e’s called by, sir. I meets ’im last evenin’, walkin’ with a very pretty gal.’

‘A tall, slight, young lady, with very large eyes, and bright-coloured hair?’ Ralph asked eagerly.

‘That’s ’er, sir—that’s ’er. You’ve just ’it ’er off! Well, I sees ’em, and I follows ’em to that there ’ouse. Then this mornin’ I drives by there, and I sees ’*im*—the

*Capt'ing*—a-comin' out o' the 'ouse with a portmanteau in 'is 'and, and the servant gal tells me as 'ow 'is name is Foster. O' course I says nothink to 'er about Hurkurt.'

'Quite right,' said Ralph, and then he gave the man another shilling, and bade him 'good-bye.'

'Good-bye, sir. If hever you wants me again, sir, I stands near the Horatry generally. Good-bye, sir; I'm No. 15976.'

'And now to find Cosy, and get a few words with her,' said Ralph to himself, as he hailed a hansom, and ordered the driver to drop him at the Fulham Road corner of Sydney Street.

There he alighted, paid, and dismissed the man, and then proceeded on foot to No. —.

It was a dirty-looking house, sadly in want of paint and whitewash, and the windows of it were perfectly opaque with dust. The door was blistered by the sun, and where the blisters had swollen, street-boys had poked their fingers into them, thereby causing great white spots to ap-

pear, until the panels looked as if they were suffering from some cutaneous disease.

On the door was a brass plate, upon which Ralph read the name of 'Snoozer.'

'Who was Snoozer?' he wondered, as he rang the bell, which was answered by a handsome but filthy girl, with a most forbidding expression of countenance.

'Is Miss Foster at home?' Ralph inquired.

'Miss *Who*?'

'Miss Foster.'

'Don't know such a person.'

Ralph saw that there was but one thing to be done. Slipping half-a-sovereign into the girl's hand, he said in a determined voice, and planting his foot down firmly in the doorway:

'I want to see Miss Foster, a young lady who is lodging here.'

'There are three young ladies lodgin' 'ere,' she replied sulkily, but with less resolution in her voice than before.

Then muttering something about 'goin'



and the coral lips were colourless, and the smooth, round cheeks sunken and wan. When she smiled, she looked like the Cosy of yore : for that smile could never part with its gleam ; and to-day it seemed to dart like a ray of sunlight through the gloomy, cheerless room. But it was seen but rarely now, and it faded very quickly.

As she came forward with hands outstretched to meet him, Ralph had time to take in every detail of her appearance : the shabby serge dress, with its frayed braid and worn-out binding ; the torn piece of black lace, hastily knotted round her smooth white throat ; the missing buttons and the absence of cuffs ; and they all told a tale that made him sigh heavily, as he recalled the brilliant, well-dressed beauty of two and a half years ago.

How difficult it was to know how to advise this girl aright ! What would be best for her ? Had she better marry Oliver—with or without his parents' consent—and run the risk of a life of dull, respectable poverty, in the event of their

to see,' she retired, and Ralph entered the house, resolving, now that he was in it, not to leave it again until he had seen Cosy.

Meanwhile the sulky one had walked off to the end of the passage, and had tapped at a side door :

'Miss! gen'man wants to see you, miss.'

'Oh, Jane! you know I can't see any-one,' replied a familiar voice from within ; at the sound of which Ralph sprang forward.

'Cosy, it is I! I must see you!'

Then the door was thrown open with a joyous cry, and the next minute Ralph found himself face to face with Cosy Urquhart.

Yes, it was indeed Cosy who stood before him ; but oh, how altered she was! If he had found her changed last year from what he remembered her in the old Paris days, he was doubly, trebly struck by the difference in her now.

She was deadly pale—the yellow pallor of an arum—and there were greenish-purple rings round her wonderful eyes,

and the coral lips were colourless, and the smooth, round cheeks sunken and wan. When she smiled, she looked like the Cosy of yore : for that smile could never part with its gleam ; and to-day it seemed to dart like a ray of sunlight through the gloomy, cheerless room. But it was seen but rarely now, and it faded very quickly.

As she came forward with hands outstretched to meet him, Ralph had time to take in every detail of her appearance : the shabby serge dress, with its frayed braid and worn-out binding ; the torn piece of black lace, hastily knotted round her smooth white throat ; the missing buttons and the absence of cuffs ; and they all told a tale that made him sigh heavily, as he recalled the brilliant, well-dressed beauty of two and a half years ago.

How difficult it was to know how to advise this girl aright ! What would be best for her ? Had she better marry Oliver—with or without his parents' consent—and run the risk of a life of dull, respectable poverty, in the event of their

not relenting? Or had she better remain on in her disreputable home and take her chance of a more brilliant release? For one like her any fate seemed possible.

She was an enigma, an insoluble problem; and Ralph, who had no fancy for a sphinx—however beautiful she might be—began to wish that poor Averil's daughter were either more like other girls, or else that he might cease to feel this almost painful interest in her.

That was the effect she had on him. She aroused his interest—not his love. She fired his imagination, she excited his curiosity, she awakened his pity; but she never touched his heart as Agnes Sheridan had done.

He could not tell *why* it was so, but it *was* so. He had told himself more than once, after listening to his mother's fears and warnings on the subject, that many men in his position might have fallen in love with Cosy. But he had not done so. Why or wherefore he could not say. It is always useless to attempt to seek for a

reason in such cases. If we only knew why we loved, we should know the secret of all things. There is but one answer to the question : that it is she.

For a minute or two Ralph and Cosy stood together in silence, he holding her long slender hands in a firm grasp, while he gazed into her cold white face. Then they sat down together, side by side, on the rickety horse-hair sofa.





## CHAPTER VII.

### ILL AND MISERABLE.

‘Tous les rayons de jour de mon ciel rayeux  
S’en vout l’un après l’autre.’

V. HUGO.

‘**Y**OU have been ill, my child,’ said  
Ralph, kindly.

‘Ill and miserable,’ she replied, in a tone so hard, so joyless, so unlike her former self, that listening to it, it seemed to Ralph as if the Cosy of old must be dead, and this was some poor, wan, broken-hearted likeness of her come to take her place. He laid his hand gently on hers.

‘Tell me about it, dear. Remember

your mother always told me her troubles when she spoke of them to no one else. You can trust me, can't you, Cosy?' he added, seeing that the white lips never moved.

'Oh! yes, I can trust you,' she said, with a low, forced laugh; 'but I have suffered since I last saw you, as I did not believe that anybody could suffer and live. And I hate to recall it. To speak of it seems like living through it again. Oh, Ralph! what I have gone through God only knows!'

'Poor child! Why didn't you write to us? We have often wondered why you never did, and wished for some tidings of you.'

She shrugged her shoulders wearily.

'Why should I trouble people with my miseries, and my ill-spelt letters? Besides, I have not had a penny to buy a stamp with for months. I'm beginning to forget what money looks like. And then I've no writing-paper or envelopes. I've nothing in the world. I even sold poor mamma's

Prayer-book when I wanted a few pence to buy fresh eggs for the children. Papa never gives me a shilling now. Quite right too, if he doesn't wish me to run away !

'I don't know about running away,' said Ralph. 'I don't approve of desperate measures if they can be dispensed with. But you must certainly leave this house ; you must not stay here.'

He spoke with his old air of authority ; very kindly, but patronisingly, as was his wont.

'Do you suppose that I stay from choice ?' she asked scornfully. 'Do you think that I have any lingering remnant of regard for *him* ? Do you believe that, if it were not for poor little Hardie, I should be here to-day ?' But for him I should have bolted to Paris long ago, and have thrown myself upon Adolphe Lesoeur's generosity. I wonder if he would care for me as a model now ? Or perhaps you would take compassion on me, and hire me, Ralph ?'

She had thrown off her depression and melancholy by this time, and was rattling away in her old free-and-easy style. But it did not amuse Ralph as it used to do ; it seemed so entirely out of harmony with her appearance and her surroundings ; just as in former days it had seemed to his mother to be out of harmony with Averil's sad face and invalid ways.

'You only mention Hardie,' he said suddenly ; 'where is Frank ?'

A sudden flush overspread her pale face.

'The day we bolted from Ryde—like the thieves that we are—George Ripley met us at Portsmouth. I was half-crazy that morning ; poor Franky was so ill—so totally unfit to travel. Nobody but papa would have allowed a sick child to be moved in such weather ; and at Portsmouth Station the boy fainted away. Well, papa was just going to lift him bodily into the railway carriage when George mercifully interposed, and sent Franky back to his hotel ; and there the child has been ever since.'

‘But he’ll return to you, won’t he?’ asked Ralph, anxiously.

He did not like the idea of George Ripley getting hold of the children. It sounded terribly like inserting the thin edge of the wedge. He had Franky now. Suppose he were to ask for Hardie next? Then, might not Cosy follow? And if she did, who could blame her—with such a home and such a father?

‘Oh yes, Franky will return to us soon enough,’ replied Cosy. ‘It was awfully good of George to take him at all; but he won’t burden himself with such a charge for long, you may be sure of that.’

Ralph did not feel quite so sure in this case. ‘Have you heard from Ripley lately?’ he asked.

‘Heard from him? I never hear from anyone. I wish I could say that I never saw anyone; for you and poor old George are the only people I have set eyes on for months past whom I can even tolerate. Ralph, if you disapproved of the company in the Rue de la Madeleine, and of the

society at Currall Cottage, I don't know what you would say to the people who come here. Faugh!' and she gave a shudder of disgust.

'Then you do see Ripley?' said Ralph, returning to the charge.

'Oh yes, I see him sometimes, thank goodness! He is some sort of protection.' ('Against everyone but himself, I suppose,' thought Ralph.) 'He is up in town every week. He only keeps on those rooms at Portsmouth because some great friend of his is quartered there now; and Franky stays in them when George is away, under the care of George's valet, Hector, who has known us all since we were tiny children. I think that papa ought to be ashamed of leaving his sick boy for so long to be a burden and expense to the friend to whom we owe so much already.'

'What do you owe Ripley?' asked Ralph, in alarm.

'He lent papa the money to pay the damages in that shameful case. And you know what lending papa money means.'

Ralph was happy to think that he did not know from experience ; but he could well 'imagine what it might be.'

'Well, Cosy,' he said, trying to speak cheerfully, 'there is only one bright side to this dark business : you are to be spared a step-mother.'

'And I am very sorry to hear it—very sorry. I would far rather have had a dozen step-mothers than know my father to be such a heartless scoundrel. They say that the poor girl is so pretty, and that she cared for him—*cared* for him. Ah ! what ruffians men are ! Her brother would have killed papa if she—poor little thing !—had not flung herself between them. I never shall forget that night when papa returned home with the scar over his eye.' (She fairly shivered as she recalled it, and covered her face with her hands, as if to shut out the memory of some horrible sight.) 'He told me then that he had had a row, and I supposed that he had been cheating at cards (it wouldn't have been the first time);

and he added that we might have to leave Ryde soon ; but it was not until two or three days afterwards that he came to me, and said that we must decamp at once—that there was no time to lose. I sat up all that night packing, and nursing poor little Franky, who was ill, and who could not bear me out of his sight ; and the next day we all came up here, all except Franky, who was left, as I told you, at Portsmouth with George. It was many weeks later when the whole affair came out in the papers. Ralph, what does Oliver say to it ?

‘ I haven’t seen him lately ; but I was staying at Marchmont when your letter arrived, some weeks ago, and I know that he feels for you deeply.’

‘ Does not he wish to give me up ?’

The question was not asked in an apprehensive tone.

‘ Certainly not ; he wishes to marry you at once—with or without his parents’ consent.’

‘ Ah ! that won’t do,’ said Cosy, gravely ;

‘for if he married me without their consent we should have no money; and then Oliver could not put Franky and Hardie to school, as he promised to do.’

‘But if you are devoted to him, as you once told me that you were,’ replied Ralph, looking at her very fixedly, ‘surely he would be your first consideration. He should be, if you mean to marry him. Cosy, are you, or are you not, in love with Oliver Marchmont?’

‘Ralph, are you, or are you not, asking questions that do not concern you?’ And then, with a mocking laugh, Cosy jumped up, and began dancing about the room as she used to distress Mrs. Dufferin by doing at Nice.

‘I am not asking questions that do not concern me,’ replied Ralph, without a shadow of a smile on his lips. ‘Whatever concerns Oliver or yourself concerns me. And if you have misled him, Cosy, I am very sorry to hear it—very sorry, and very much disappointed in you. Truth was the virtue of all others for which I gave you

credit. I thought you were too brave to deceive.'

'And pray whom have I deceived?' she asked hotly. 'I have not deceived Oliver. I never told him that I was in love with him—and he never asked me if I were. When I said to you that I was devoted to him, I only spoke the truth. I *am* "devoted to him," in a way. He has been very good, and he is fond of me. And so am I of him, after my own fashion. But I am not in love with him, and I have never said that I was. *You*, Ralph, live so much amongst mawkish, sentimental young ladies, like the Miss Sheridans, that you learn to fancy that every girl must be in love.'

Ralph could not keep down the angry flush that would rise to his face at this scornful mention of the Sheridans; but he checked the sharp retort that he was about to make. And at that moment Agnes Sheridan's suspicions concerning Cosy flashed across him. Had she any grounds for that assertion? Was it possible that

Cosy did care for some one? Agnes had said that evening when he and she were sitting together in his library at Torquay :

‘ Miss Urquhart does not care for Oliver Marchmont because she cares for some one else.’

Was that the case ?

‘ I do not think, Cosy dear,’ said Ralph, gently, ‘ that every girl must needs be in love ; but I think that you are so likely to inspire an attachment, that it seems unlikely that you should never reciprocate it. You are not adamant, are you ?’

His tone was very soft and kind, and Cosy, who had been yearning for a sound of that voice for weeks and months, felt her heart beating to suffocation. Had he—could he have—any personal reason for asking that question ? For a moment she was silent, from very excess of hope and joy, and during that moment Ralph drew her little hand into his.

‘ I wish you would trust me, Cosy,’ he said. ‘ I know that your experience of

life must have robbed you in a great measure of the power to trust. But you may rely on me. Indeed you may. Is there anyone you care for ?

Still no answer. But if at that moment the light had shone on Cosy's face instead of on Ralph's, he would surely have needed no reply.

'Cosy,' he went on, 'forgive me if I am treading on delicate ground ; but your happiness is very dear to me. Is it—Littledale ?'

Is it Littledale ! Cosy bit her lips till the red blood stained them. *That* was what he had been driving at, was it ? and he had asked the question in that same kind tone of affectionate interest in which he had inquired after Franky ! 'Oh ! what a fool I am,' she said to herself, 'to give this man another thought ; he cares no more for me than he does for the boys ! He classes us all together. We are Averil's children.'

'No, it is not Aubrey Littledale !' she cried, with a laugh that seemed to pierce

the walls. 'That universal conqueror has made no impression upon me. He has his Flore and his Agnes. Surely he may rest content. He does not want a third female heart to succumb to him. It would be *de luxe*. The other two are *so* devoted.'

'Cosy, you should not speak like that!' cried Ralph, sternly. 'You have no right to couple Miss Sheridan's name with that of a woman like Madame de Senac.'

It was an unfortunate speech, notwithstanding that Ralph considered it a very guarded one.

'I really don't see why I should not!' exclaimed Cosy, in all the bitterness of a cry wrung from her by pain. 'They seem to hunt in couples. They both pursue him. They both wear his portrait; the one in a diamond locket given her by him, the other in a *flacon* bought by herself—a most extravagant piece of sentiment! Oh, Ralph, don't look like that—at *me*! Ralph, I did not mean to make you angry; but I am so—so—oh, so utterly wretched!'

and hiding her face in her hands, she began to sob loud tearless sobs of uncontrollable anguish.

When she looked up again presently, she saw that Ralph had risen, and that he was standing before her. She sprung to her feet :

‘ Don’t go, Ralph. Please don’t. I am so lonely. I have not seen you for so, so long.’

‘ I must go, dear child,’ he said kindly ; for although he was angry with her for speaking as she had done of Agnes Sheridan, he felt very sorry for her, and he pitied her from the depth of his heart. ‘ I must go now. But may I tell Oliver to come and see you ?’

‘ No, you may not. Indeed you may not. Papa would be furious. I don’t know what he would not do if he were to catch sight of Oliver ; he considers that it is all *his* fault that I am not married ;’ and she laughed very bitterly. ‘ And you can quite understand how wild that makes him. Besides, I don’t want to see Oliver,’

she added, in a weary tone. 'It can do no good.'

'Poor darling!' said Ralph, soothingly. 'We must—between us—do something for you, to get you away from here. Don't look so sad, dear: things will come right in time.'

"The darkest hour of all the night  
Is the one that brings the day."

'There are no more good days coming for me,' she said. 'I know it. I feel it. I have had my good times. I seem to have crept out of the sunshine altogether into the shadow.'

"Until the day-dawn, and the shadows flee away," murmured Ralph, half inaudibly; the text that he had seen Agnes Sheridan illuminating the previous week recurring to him at this moment.

'What is that?' asked Cosy. 'Say it again.'

He repeated the words.

'I like that,' she said. 'I shall try and remember it. Is it from Shakespeare?'

‘No,’ replied Ralph, stifling a smile. ‘It is a text out of the Bible.’

‘It is a very pretty one ; prettier than most of those I know.’

‘I will send you the verse when I return to Torquay. A young lady I know there illuminates texts and sells them for a charity.’

Cosy knew perfectly well who the young lady was. Could she not see Agnes Sheridan illuminating texts, and Ralph praising her for so doing ?

‘Please don’t,’ she said coldly ; ‘I have no room for such things here.’

‘Very well.’ He thought her very strange and capricious to-day—very unlike her former self ; but he was determined not to take offence. ‘Good-bye, then, Cosy dear. You must give my love to the boys.’

‘Yes.’

‘Won’t you send your love to my mother ?’

‘Yes.’

He was standing by the door, but an irresistible impulse drew him back.

‘Keep a good heart, Cosy. Courage! Relief will soon come.’

She shook her head mournfully.

‘Never. It is too late. Go now, Ralph. You had better. It will not do for papa to return and find you here.’

Ralph lingered for a moment, then stooped and touched her brow with his lips, remembering that he had always taken leave of Averil thus; and in another minute he was standing in the dull dark street, down which a biting north-east wind was blowing, driving the violet-girls and the orange-boys into snug corners, and under sheltered doorways, from which the policeman would soon eject them.

There was not a cab to be seen until Ralph turned into the Fulham Road, when he hailed the first hansom he caught sight of, and told the driver to take him to Hyde Park Place; for he had made up his mind to tell Oliver all that had passed that afternoon, barring, of course, the remarks upon himself. All minor considerations as to whether Cosy and

Oliver were suited to each other or not, were swamped in the desire to see her taken away from her father, and placed under the protection of some good honest gentleman—a husband under whose wing she would be safe from George Ripley's kindnesses and attentions. The obligations to him were becoming undesirably heavy, Ralph thought.

At the door of the Marchmonts' house stood a brougham, which Ralph at first took to be the carriage that daily conveyed Oliver and his father to and from the City, and he asked the coachman if Mr. Oliver Marchmont were in.

'I don't know, sir,' replied the man.  
'This is Dr. Glennie's carriage.'

At the same moment the front door opened, and one of the footmen appeared, and told the coachman that he could go away, that Dr. Glennie would walk home.

'Is Mr. Oliver in, James?' asked Ralph.

'Yes, sir,' replied the man, gravely;  
'and I think that he would see you, for I

know that he sent a note to your hotel about half an hour ago——'

'Is anything the matter, then?' interrupted Ralph.

'Haven't you heard, sir? Mr. Marchmont dropped down dead about an hour and a half ago, just as he was starting for the bank. Her ladyship is terribly cut up, sir.'





## CHAPTER VIII.

### OUT OF THE DEPTHS.

'Tout tremble sous mes pieds,  
Tout croule où je m'appuie.'

**W**HILE Ralph and Cosy were sitting together discussing the shortcomings of Captain Urquhart, and the misery he had brought on his family and on all who had anything to do with him, that worthy was disporting himself not many hundred yards off, pacing up and down the King's Road in the company of one of his most constant companions nowadays, a certain Mr. Luke Carew, the son of a sporting butcher.

Mr. Luke Carew was one of the gentle-

men to whom the waiter at the Pier Hotel, Ryde, had alluded, when he talked of 'the Capting's scratch pack lot ;' and Mr. Luke Carew was a very fair sample of the set into which Jack had fallen, differing from the rest of them in one respect only—that he was honest, as scrupulously honest, as it is possible for a turfite to be ; and in his secret soul he despised Captain Urquhart for his laxity about money matters, with a vehemence that men reserve exclusively for sins of that class. But notwithstanding his contempt for Jack, he showed no distaste for his society ; on the contrary, he sought it on every possible occasion, having made up his mind to wed Captain Urquhart's daughter, and being perfectly well aware that that could not be brought about without first 'squaring Jack.'

That feat being accomplished, and in a very unforeseen manner, the process being materially assisted by Jack himself, the next step was to win Cosy. And it was upon this subject that Luke and his

companion were discoursing as they paced up and down the King's Road, both of them in the worst of bad tempers, but the bad temper of each proceeding from a totally different cause.

Jack had—what he termed—drawn the net too tightly over his own head, and was inwardly swearing thereat; while Mr. Carew's cause of complaint was Miss Urquhart's continued and invincible coldness. He could not understand it; it seemed extraordinary to him that any girl living in a slum like Sydney Street should be so blind to her own interest as to slight his proffered hand. But it was so, nevertheless.

'I'd do anything for my wife if I liked her,' he had said to Miss Urquhart on the occasion of his introduction to her at Ryde some months previously. 'She should be the best-dressed woman in London if she chose; and I'd mount her on a horse that you wouldn't beat anywhere. I've refused four hundred for Poppet—(Poppet was the chestnut mare that the future Mrs. Carew

was to ride)—I mean Poppet for a wedding present for my wife.'

To which speech Cosy had replied 'Oh!' as if the subject were—as it was—totally uninteresting to her. The society of this young snob was very offensive to her. But then most of her father's friends were offensive, and Mr. Carew was no worse than the rest. So for a time she tolerated him; until he followed her from Ryde to London, and waxed confidential over the Flawes affair, and then she grew angry. It was an impertinence, she told George Ripley, and George agreed with her, and snubbed Mr. Carew very openly; and it was of Ripley's manner, amongst other things, that Luke was complaining this afternoon, as he and Jack paced up and down the King's Road, sheltering themselves and their cigars as best they could from the biting north-east wind.

Jack was very angry with George Ripley for snubbing young Carew; and very angry with Luke for complaining. They were both useful to him, and he was

in debt to both, and he could not afford to quarrel with either.

‘Why the devil couldn’t they keep on good terms with each other?’ he muttered to himself angrily.

And then he began to swear inwardly at Cosy for *her* share in the affair. Why the deuce didn’t she stand in with him — her father — instead of turning to Ripley?

Jack was beginning to feel somewhat uncomfortable in the presence of his old friend George; they had had several rows lately; and he was not quite easy about Cosy either. Ripley was almost the only man she was civil to nowadays, and Jack was perfectly well aware that *people talked*. He had been equally well aware of this for some years past; but formerly, when Cosy was rational, and willing to make a sensible marriage, this talk did not signify. But now that she had set her heart upon marrying a d—d young prig, whose people would not let him have anything to say to her, it made a considerable difference in

the state of affairs, and the flirtation with George must be put a stop to.

He could not marry her himself, and he kept other men off. And that was just what Cosy wished—hang her ! Oh, it was evidently an understood thing between the two—hang them both !—and the idea of Cosy having an understanding with George Ripley, and of his being left out in the cold, inflamed Jack's temper to such a pitch that no man who had not Luke's private and personal reasons for putting up with it could have stood it.

'We shall have Ripley down in Sydney Street to-night,' said Carew presently. 'He is back again in town. Penter told me so this morning.'

'Well, if he does come, he won't do you any harm,' replied Jack, with a sneer.

Cosy and George were the real objects of his anger, but he was ready to vent his wrath upon anyone who turned up.

'Yes ; he will do me harm : he'll laugh at me to her.'

'Bah ! What does that signify ?'

If it were only to be a laughing matter, Jack did not care. What he dreaded was Cosy putting her foot down and positively refusing to do his will, and then appealing to George Ripley to protect her. If she did that, there'd be the devil to pay he knew; for George might apply the screw if he chose: and so, unfortunately, might some one else too.

'That cursed thousand pounds!' he exclaimed, gnawing his moustache angrily.

'Well, I'll pay him when Cosy marries me, I promise you; and you know, Jack, I'm as good as my word.'

'When Cosy marries me!' Jack shuddered.

'And you know, Jack,' continued young Carew, 'that with *that other thousand*——'

'I know!' roared Jack. 'Can't you hold your tongue about that confounded money?'

His handsome face looked almost green in the sunlight, and his hand trembled.

'I wish you would speak to her to-night, Urquhart,' urged young Carew sulkily.

'Why don't you speak yourself? Dozens

of other fellows have proposed to Cosy. No one else ever asked me to do it for them.'

'Because they were fellows, I suppose, to whom she was civil. She isn't to me. I can't get the chance to speak to her. She won't listen. If I begin to talk, she gets up and goes out of the room.'

'Well then, get up and go after her.'

They had reached the Urquharts' door by this time, and the two men paused.

'Shall I go in now?' asked Carew eagerly.

He had lunched at four p.m., and he felt more courageous than he often did at that hour of the day.

Jack hesitated.

When it came to the point, he *could* not say 'Go in and win!' to this red-faced, bull-necked, underbred young butcher. He remembered the days—not so long ago—when he had told himself that his child was fit to be a duchess; and although debts and drink and dissipation had made him see things in a different light now, he

could not feel pleased at the thought of handing her over to Mr. Luke Carew.

‘Come to-morrow,’ he said.

‘Oh yes, that’s always it. It’s always to-morrow — never to-day. Look here, Jack, I’m not going to wait much longer! Just you mind that it *is* to-morrow. I’ll make her a good, kind husband. She shall have everything on earth that women like : dresses from Worth, ponies, carriages, horses, old lace, high art things—dadoes, and papers, and all the rest of it. And she may go to balls and parties every night of her life, if she likes ; but marry me she must!’

‘All right—all right!’ said Jack impatiently, ‘I’ll tell her all that ;’ and in he went, wishing to goodness that he knew how best to say that horrible thing that must be said—and said quickly too.

Cosy was reading as her father entered the house, and, according to an old habit of her’s, she was reading aloud : she always did when she was alone.

The book was some historical work that

Ralph had brought in, and had inadvertently left behind him, and she was reading from it a speech of Burke's :

“ It is gone, that sensibility of principle, that chastity of honour that felt a stain like a wound, which inspired courage while it mitigated ferocity, which ennobled whatever it touched ; and——” ’

Jack did not care much for this style of literature, and thought he had heard about enough of it by this time.

‘ Cosy ! ’ he cried, kicking open the door.

‘ Yes, papa. ’

‘ Why are you trying your eyes, reading in the dark ? Why don't you ring for candles ? ’

‘ I can see quite well by the window. I can't bear ringing for that girl. ’

‘ Well, she is a beast, I admit. We must get away from here—when we can. ’

Then Jack sat down and lit a cigarette ; but after a few puffs he threw it away and opened the window. Then, after a minute or two, he began to swear at the draught, and went and shut the window. Then he

closed the door, and then finally sat down again.

‘What is the matter?’ thought Cosy.  
‘There is something disagreeable coming, I know.’

She knew how to read the signs of the times pretty accurately now. She felt what these attempts to make conversation, this fidgetiness, portended; and she thought, as her father did, that the sooner the storm burst the sooner it might clear off.

‘What have you been doing this afternoon?’ she asked at length, determined to put a leading question, and bring matters to a crisis.

‘I have been lunching with Carew. He is a capital fellow, is Carew. He has just been telling me about his horses.’

‘About Poppet, papa?’

‘Yes; how did you guess?’

‘I never heard him talk about anything else.’

‘She is a very valuable animal; but he won’t sell her: he says he means his wife to ride her.’

‘ I didn’t know he had a wife.’

‘ He hasn’t, Cosy ; but—look here, Cosy, it’s no good beating about the bush. He wants to marry you.’

‘ Does he, indeed ?’

‘ My dear Cosy, it’s no good looking scornful. He’s a capital fellow—he’s rich, goodnatured, and——’

‘ And a butcher. Papa, understand once for all, I cannot and will not listen to this. Of course Mr. Carew didn’t mean to insult me, but you must give him to understand that the thing is impossible.’

Jack did not fly into a rage, neither did he curse or swear, or do anything that his daughter expected. He only turned a shade paler, as he said in a low, hoarse voice :

‘ Cosy, my child, don’t refuse at once. Think it over.’

She shook her head.

‘ Papa, I am very sorry to be such a burden to you. I wish for your sake that I were married, and off your hands. But I cannot marry Mr. Carew.’

‘You’re thinking of that snivelling young——’

‘Don’t be abusive, papa. I am thinking of myself when I say that I cannot and will not marry Mr. Carew.’

And then she rose to leave the room. Jack flew to the door, and barred her egress.

‘Let me pass, papa.’

‘I will not unless you promise——’

‘Let me pass, or I’ll open the window and cry for help.’

‘Cosy, for Heaven’s sake, don’t make a fool of yourself!’ cried Jack, seizing her arm. ‘Listen to me. You must marry Carew. I have promised. I—I am bound to him. You don’t understand, child. I owe him money, and——’

‘Oh, I understand, perfectly. You owe him money, and I am to be sold to pay your debts. It sounds very romantic, but it is only in books and plays that such things are ever done, papa. At all events, I’m not going to do it. You have told me often and often that what you term debts of honour need not be paid in a hurry; that

a man cannot, as you call it, *come upon you* for the money. Let Mr. Carew wait.'

'He won't.'

'He must.'

'Cosy, you'll drive me mad if you go on like this. This is not exactly a debt of honour.'

'You've been borrowing money of him?'

'Ye——'

'Have you, or have you not, papa? If I'm to help you I must know all.'

'Well, I didn't precisely borrow the money. It was like this: he was always so deucedly anxious to be lending me money—I suppose he wanted to get into your good graces—and then one day he wasn't at hand, and——'

'And you took it, I suppose?' she said scornfully.

'I hadn't the money at hand—and I had to write a cheque—and I wrote his name—instead of mine.'

'You forged this young butcher's name?'

'He was always so deucedly anxious to lend me money.'

‘So it appears. Look here, papa, don’t go on talking nonsense to me. Let us clearly understand each other. You have forged this man’s name, and he is beginning to make himself disagreeable about it.’

‘Yes, Cosy, that is just it. How sensible you always are!’

‘I don’t want any compliments, papa. You haven’t spoken kindly to me for months, and you are only doing so now because you want something. Mr. Carew has threatened to have you punished for this forgery.’

‘He doesn’t wish that, Cosy. He only wishes you to marry him.’

‘He has a singular way of ingratiating himself with me. But never mind. We’ll let that pass. If I marry him he’ll give you up the forged cheque?’

‘Yes, Cosy—then you will?’

She paused for one moment—but only for one moment, and then she answered firmly and unhesitatingly :

‘I cannot.’

‘Oh, Cosy, think ! think ! don’t say no !

Remember I shall have to go to prison—to prison, Cosy! and you will have a convict for a father! And then, overpowered by grief and fear and anger, to say nothing of brandy, Jack Urquhart broke down, and began to sob like a child.

But his tears did not touch Cosy. (No exhibition of weakness in a man did.) She despised him for them—despised him all the more that she remembered how insensible he had been to the tears and pleadings of the poor girl who had a *claim* on his mercy. He had none upon her's, Cosy's. True, he was her father, but he was also the man who had broken her mother's heart, and who had just blighted the life of an innocent, loving girl.

'He can weep over his own woes,' she said to herself—'he can wince under the lash like a beaten hound, but he could let that girl's name be dragged through the mire of ignominy.'

What did it signify to her if people did point at her as a convict's child? Everyone knew that she was Jack Urquhart's

daughter, and that there was many a man in Dartmoor or Millbank jail whose life had been spotless in comparison with handsome Jack's career.

'I cannot help you in this matter, papa,' she cried bitterly; and then, seeing a hand upraised to strike her, she turned with a cry of terror, and fled, never pausing until she gained her own room. Then she flung herself down by her bedside, and tried to collect her thoughts.

What would happen to her now? Who could save her? Where should she turn for help? Through the mists and darkness that enveloped her path, a voice that she had heard not long ago seemed to speak out to her in words that for the last six months had haunted her heart and brain. How little had Ralph thought when he uttered them that he was going to strike the key-note of his hearer's life! Ah! how little do we any of us realise the effect our words may produce! 'Always do what you believe to be right, and never let anyone persuade you into doing wrong.'

That was what the voice said to her. How should she obey it ?

‘What is right ? Ah, my God ! what is right ?’ she cried in her bitter anguish, as she had cried once before.

She tried to pray—she who never prayed ; she asked—not for help, peace, safety—but that she might know what Ralph would have her do.

The light is always shining for those who seek it. There is One who is ever ready to leave the sheep who are safe in the fold, to seek the poor rover on the cold hills. There is no height He cannot reach—no depth He cannot sound. When life’s worst ills invade us, He is then most nigh.

As poor Cosy knelt there wrestling in prayer and anguish, fear seemed gradually to pass into strength, doubt into certainty : the light pierced through the encircling gloom, and her path lay clear before her. Whatever else might be dubious, it *must* be right to be truthful, honest, patient, brave ; so she would bear on, and keep up her courage, as Ralph had bade her do,

and not fly from her present ills—the worst of which she knew—into a marriage with a man she loathed. She could not swear to love, honour, and obey Luke Carew. She could not, and she would not.

‘No, I will not—I will not do it, Ralph,’ she cried; and then a mist seemed to gather before her eyes, and a weight to fall upon her limbs. She tried to rise, but she was too weary, and her head ached terribly; her little hands, too, were very, very hot, and she could almost hear the throbbing of her pulse. But it seemed as if the pain of her sorrow had subsided, the keen edge of her grief had worn off. Nothing seemed to signify very much now. Was it that the day had dawned—at last? Were the shadows really fleeing away? Was it Ralph’s voice that was calling to her?—Ralph’s hand that was beckoning?

She could not hear distinctly, for there were strange sounds ringing in her ears; and when she tried to rise to go to him, her strength gave way, and she fell forward—senseless.



## CHAPTER IX.

### THE UNFORESEEN.

‘We never go to meet, of set purpose, the important things of this life. We turn suddenly round a corner, and come upon them all at once.’

**I**N the darkened dining-room Ralph found Oliver sitting alone, confronting the portrait of Lord Aberdeen. He started up as Mr. Dufferin was announced.

‘Then you got my note, Ralph?’

‘No; I called by chance. I’ve received no note; I haven’t been in for some hours.’ And then the conventional assurances of sympathy and condolence with which Ralph was generally so ready on such occasions

died away upon his lips, as he looked into the cub's stolid, unmoved face ; he had not even the good grace to feign sorrow.

‘ Your poor mother ! I am so sorry for you both, Oliver. So terribly sudden——’

‘ Yes, it was very sudden,’ mumbled Oliver. And then, eagerly : ‘ Ralph, what made you come here ? You never do call at this hour. Was it that—yes, I’m *sure*, Ralph, that you have seen her.’

‘ Yes, I’ve seen her,’ replied Ralph coldly, thinking that Oliver’s very jubilant voice and manner were scarcely in good taste.

‘ Where ?’

‘ It doesn’t much signify, for it is where you cannot go, Oliver. She has told me very plainly that your presence would only add to her troubles.’

‘ Not *now*, Ralph ; it cannot add to them *now* ! Remember, Ralph, I can marry her this hour if I choose. And I will. I’ll——’

‘ Mr. Fussell has called, sir. He wishes to know if you would like to see him. He

happened to be next door, sir, and has just heard——'

Mr. Fussell was the family lawyer, and had been an old friend of the deceased.

'I don't want to see anybody, William,' replied Oliver; 'but perhaps, Ralph, you would not mind telling Fussell that I can't see him to-day.'

Ralph went into the next room—the library—where the old solicitor was awaiting Oliver, professional sympathy written in every crease of his puckered face. He brightened up when he saw Ralph.

'Ah, my dear Mr. Dufferin, I am thankful to see you here—I am indeed. It must be such a comfort to them both to have you with them. Strangely enough I happened to be sent for this afternoon to see poor Sir Matthew Hake, who is dying next door, and as I was leaving his house I heard—ah, very sad!—very sad indeed. So sudden, too! William tells me that our poor friend just fell back into the arms of his son, who was helping him on with his coat.'

‘Oliver has told me no details as yet,’ said Ralph. ‘I have only been here a few minutes ; I called by accident. Oliver has asked me to beg you to be so kind as to excuse him. He——’

‘Oh, of course, I quite understand—quite.’

‘Mr. Fussell,’ said Ralph suddenly, as the old lawyer—whom he knew pretty well, having stayed with him at Marchmont—was leaving the room, ‘was that threat put into execution ? did Mr. Marchmont ever make that codicil ?’

‘No,’ whispered Mr. Fussell ; ‘it was to have been added this very week. I’m very glad it wasn’t done, Mr. Dufferin.’

Then Ralph returned to Oliver, and suggested that he should go to Lady Lavinia.

‘She doesn’t want me,’ was the prompt reply ; ‘she said she didn’t want anybody.’

‘Canon Rowe, sir,’ said William, in a mysterious tone, reappearing at the door.

‘I won’t see him !’ cried Oliver, savagely.

Ralph gave him a warning glance.

'He is just outside, Oliver.'

'I don't care where he is ; he is not coming in here. I've been bored with him long enough. I hate the sight of the man.'

William disappeared.

'Perhaps Lady Lavinia might like to see him,' suggested Ralph.

'Then let her send for him. Ralph, you must tell me where Cosy is. If you don't, I shall set a detective this very night to find her.'

Having learnt that the codicil had not been made, Ralph felt less inclined to interpose. So he told Oliver where the Urquharts were staying, adding that he had seen Cosy by the merest accident, and that it would not do for him to attempt to return there.

Oliver at once flew to the bell.

'Now what is that for, Oliver ?' cried Ralph.

'For the brougham.'

'You are not going to have the brougham out *now* to go *there* !'

‘I am. You’ll come with me?’

‘Certainly not.’

‘Then I shall go by myself.’

‘If you’ll wait until after dinner, and go in a cab, I will accompany you.’

So it was decided; and then the two adjourned to the library, where Ralph spent one of the longest hours he had ever spent, even in Oliver’s company.

Lady Lavinia did not appear, and her sympathetic son only went to her once for a few minutes.

‘She does not want me,’ he said to Ralph, who did not feel surprised at that.

‘I felt for her horribly,’ Mr. Dufferin wrote his mother the next day; ‘but I dare say she is not half so miserable as one imagines. And appearances will be no criterion in this case, for she never looks anything but wretched. Gloom has become her normal condition. And, after all, there was never any tenderness or sympathy between her and her husband. But, probably for that very reason, she will consider it necessary to *filer le*

*parfait amour* for him now that he is gone. I have generally observed that the less the wife has cared, the louder the widow laments. As to Oliver, he is a living proof of the evil of a repressive system of education. You never know where a person so brought up will break out. He has astonished me not a little during the last few hours. The reign of the *Rock* is at an end here, for Oliver believes that Canon Rowe brought his influence to bear against Cosy. So much for Master Oliver's firm adherence to the Evangelical party!

Contrary to Ralph's expectations, the dirty servant-girl did not try to prevent his entry when he arrived with Oliver Marchmont. The passage was pitch-dark, and she probably took them for some of the *habitues* of the house who looked in of an evening for Nap and Loo. Ralph brushed quickly past her, and made his way straight to the room in which he had sat with Cosy, and there he found Jack playing cards with two young men whom he—Ralph—at once stigmatised as 'a pair of horrid

young ruffians.' They were all three very tipsy ; and they looked by no means pleased when they beheld the addition to their party. But Jack was fairly civil to Ralph, although he took no notice of Oliver.

'We have come to see Miss Urquhart,' Oliver was beginning to blurt out, in defiance of Ralph's warning glances, when one of the ruffians glanced up, and said in a very angry voice that Miss Urquhart was engaged to be married to him, and that he did not allow her to receive visits from gentlemen at this time of night.

Whereupon Oliver turned crimson, and was about to reply—goodness knows what!—when the door opened, and, to Ralph's intense relief, George Ripley entered.

The ex-hussar took in the scene at a glance.

'Come out of the room,' he said, seizing Oliver by the arm ; 'Carew is as drunk as a fiddler, and he is one of the brutes whom

good wine turns into a fiend. He'll hurl that tumbler at your head in a moment.'

Between them, George Ripley and Ralph managed to drag Oliver out into the passage; and then Ralph told Mr. Ripley that they had come to speak to Cosy on a matter of importance, and that it would be a great bore if they had to leave the house without seeing her.

'I suppose she is in her room,' said George; 'she generally sits there of an evening. I'll send Janet for her;' and so saying he plunged downstairs, returning shortly with a more amiable-looking, but even dirtier, slavey than the one with whom Ralph was acquainted. 'Now, Janet,' he said, 'you go up and tell Miss Urquhart that I want to see her at once.'

And then, having despatched his messenger, he proceeded to fetch himself a chair from an adjoining room, to light a cigar, and to make himself generally as comfortable as circumstances would permit; and Ralph, who was a great admirer of what he termed adaptiveness, began to

feel something akin to liking for the man who could so easily accommodate himself to uncomfortable circumstances. If only Oliver would imitate him in this respect! thought Ralph. But no! that the lord of Marchmont was never likely to do.

‘But with forty thousand a year he’ll be allowed to be as ill-mannered and ungenial as he pleases,’ added Ralph mentally, as he watched Oliver’s sullen countenance, and noted the stiff, rude way in which he repulsed all Mr. Ripley’s advances.

If the ill-humour had proceeded from jealousy, pure and simple, or to disapprobation of this enforced companion, Ralph could have forgiven it; but he knew perfectly well that Oliver was now making himself disagreeable from sheer ill-breeding. He was never polite to anybody out of his own set, and he was not always polite within the sacred confines.

Fortunately, Mr. Ripley was not tetchy or sensitive. He did not notice Oliver’s rudeness; or if he did, it did not trouble

him. He rattled away in his usual cheery manner, and more than once Ralph caught himself thinking that this man, with all his faults, had probably done more than anybody else towards making poor Cosy's existence bearable.

The slavey took her time to reappear, and when she did finally return it was alone, sobbing loudly, and in the wildest state of unintelligibility. All they could make out was that 'the poor deary was *that* hot, and a-ragin' and a-ravin' like——'

'Here, don't go on like that, you maniac!' shouted George. 'Show us the way to Miss Urquhart's room, and *don't* be an idiot!'

Upon reaching the wretched garret occupied by poor Cosy, her visitors discovered that the account given of her by Janet was only too true. She was in a burning fever, and quite delirious. Of course the first thing to be done was to send for a doctor; but then arose the question: 'Who was to go?'

Both Ralph and George Ripley were of

opinion that Oliver ought to be the person ; but they had much difficulty in making him see it in the same light. They succeeded, however, at last ; and off he went, looking very surly, to fetch Dr. Jameson, and then George and Ralph sat down together by the bedside of poor Cosy,

Of course their talk was entirely of her ; and Mr. Dufferin was agreeably surprised at the way in which the semi-detached husband spoke of the unhappy girl, in whose path he had unquestionably been a stumbling-block.

Nothing could have exceeded the chivalrous kindness and deference of George Ripley's manner in discussing Jack Urquhart's daughter, and he seemed genuinely glad to hear of the change that the last few hours had wrought in her prospects.

'I should be delighted,' he said, 'to hear that she was well married ; it would be the best thing possible for her.'

Perhaps Ralph's face betrayed some surprise at this remark, for George continued quickly :

‘What else is there for a woman without money to do? *All women should marry, and no men!*’

Ralph laughed.

‘And Cosy Urquhart, above all women, should not neglect any chance of marrying a man who can give her a comfortable home, and a good position,’ added George; ‘for there never was a girl with her beauty who got so few chances. You’ve no conception of what a set of rank outsiders she has been surrounded by during the last two years. . All her father’s fault, of course.’

Mr. Ripley spoke quite quietly and dispassionately.

‘His love for Cosy must either be a thing of the past, or else it never existed to the extent people supposed,’ thought Ralph, and he wondered which was the case. The former most likely, he decided; for George Ripley was not the man to haunt the path of a woman he did not care for, nor to continue to care for any one woman for a very long period. ‘He has

cared for her, and it is over ; but he is kindly and good-natured, and will always speak well of his old flame.'

That was the conclusion to which Ralph had just arrived when the door opened, and Oliver returned, followed by Dr. Jameson.

'We must get her away from here,' were the old physician's first words, after he had examined his patient. 'Haven't you got a room with a better fireplace?' he asked, turning to Janet, who had slipped in again with Oliver.

'No other room in the 'ouse hempty,' replied Janet. 'We're as full as full can be.'

'And as noisy as you can be, it seems ! Can't you stop that row downstairs ? My patient must have quiet !'

Janet gaped and stared as if she did not understand the meaning of the word. Certainly she had not much opportunity of learning it in that house. Jack and his companions, in their den, were making noise enough to wake the dead ; in the

drawing-room a woman was lyrically informing her hearers that Madame Angot's daughter was not a person to be trifled with ; whilst in the street below an organ was grinding out the 'Two Obadiahs.'

'Let her be brought to Hyde Park Place. I'll send a carriage for her,' cried Oliver.

Ralph turned sharply round :

'Impossible ! What are you thinking of, Oliver ?'

'I know where I should like to send this patient,' said Dr. Jameson. 'One of my pet nurses lives, when disengaged, out at Kensington with her mother, who lets lodgings. This nurse is at home now, and the lodgings are unoccupied, and——'

'I'll take them,' interrupted Oliver, 'if you will remove Miss Urquhart at once.'

The shrewd old Scotchman looked at Oliver, and then at Ralph, and then at George Ripley, as if to ask : 'Which of these three is master here ?' What did it all mean ? he wondered. Who was this fair invalid ?

As they had been driving along Oliver had spoken of the patient as his affianced bride ; but then young men, brought up as Dr. Jameson knew that young Marchmont had been brought up, sometimes contract strange engagements.

Had this fair lady no parents or guardians ? Who was this big, fair, good-looking man ? And what was Ralph Dufferin—whom the Scotch physician knew slightly—to this interesting invalid ? Was he here on his own account, or as Mr. Marchmont's friend ? Dr. Jameson had seen a great many queer scenes during the course of his professional experience, but this scene baffled him. Was Miss Urquhart *quite*—— Ah, well, that was no affair of his ! What he had to do for her was to restore her to health. It was not his place to make inquiries about her connections or surroundings. But one thing was very certain : the girl could not pull through a bad illness in a room like this ; with a window that would not shut, and a grate the size of an egg-cup. She must be

removed to a well-ventilated apartment in a quiet neighbourhood. And if Mr. Marchmont were ready to pay for the move—and really there appeared to be nobody else to consult——’

\* \* \* \* \*

‘It all seems like a dream,’ Ralph wrote his mother before he retired to rest that night. ‘I can’t realise it yet. So much has happened within the last few hours! Poor John Oliver gone! Oliver free, wealthy, and his own master! and Cosy kidnapped out of her father’s house, and hovering between life and death! I did not like being mixed up in the business at all, but I could not help myself; I was let in for it. I’m very thankful that Mr. Carew knows neither my name nor my address, so that if he wishes to attack anybody for to-night’s doings, he must go to Oliver. Not that I wish him to do that at such a time as the present; however, if any unpleasant scene does come off in Hyde Park Place, Oliver has only himself to thank for it. I should like to see dear

Lady Margaret's face when she hears of my fraternising with George Ripley. C'est toujours l'imprévu qui arrive. This letter is for her, and (I need not add) for Agnes, as well as for yourself; but I address it to you, knowing that you are most specially interested in poor Averil's children, and I shan't close it until to-morrow morning, when Ripley is coming in with bulletins of the invalid's progress.

' *Wednesday 10 a.m.*—G. R. has just been and gone. All fear of Urquhart's intervention is at an end. He has *d. t.* and cannot last a month, the doctor told my informant. I never heard so horrible a story as the one Ripley has just been telling me, and I can scarcely believe it. It seems, from Mr. R.'s account, that Jack Urquhart has actually forged this young Carew's name; and that when poor Cosy recovers, she will have to choose between marrying that wretch and seeing her father a convict. I can only hope that Jack will die.

' Ripley has behaved with great kind-  
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ness about the two children. At the present moment he has them both on his hands, having brought Hardie away from Sydney Street; but Oliver is going to send them to Brighton to his old school-mistress.

'G. R.'s *penchant* for Cosy is entirely over, I can see; and, to a nature like his, nothing is so completely *past* as a past love. However, he has been very kind to the poor girl, and to her little brothers, and I should think that he had some good qualities that his enemies don't give him credit for.'

'How kind and generous Ralph always is,' murmured Agnes admiringly, when Mrs. Dufferin had finished reading her son's letter; 'isn't he, mamma?'

Lady Margaret smiled a gentle assent.

'L'amour propre satisfait est toujours tendre,' she said to herself.

She knew Ralph and his weaknesses so well. She could see him in that wretched home of the Urquharts—on every inch of

which, disreputability was doubtless plainly stamped—showing unmistakably, but in a perfectly well-bred manner, that this was not the sort of thing to which he was accustomed. She could well understand how favourably his bearing towards Mr. Ripley would contrast with Oliver Marchmont's sullen, uncouth manner—poor Oliver! who was an honest gentleman, and a great *parti*, but who would never be a man of the world.

She could imagine, too, how Ralph's annoyance at finding himself thrown into intimate communion with the man he had always avoided would be tempered by the fact of this incorrigible, who had been given up by all respectable people long ago, deferring to his—Ralph's—opinion, and trying to win his goodwill. She could read between every line of Mr. Dufferin's well-written letter, and she knew that under ordinary circumstances nothing would have annoyed him so much as having to fraternise with George Ripley.

But the circumstances of yesterday had been no ordinary circumstances. Yesterday must have been a red-letter day in Ralph Dufferin's calendar. From dawn to darkness everybody and everything had combined to stimulate and to gratify his *amour propre*. Miss Urquhart had worshipped him in the afternoon. Oliver had simply and entirely depended upon him. Mr. Fussell had been pleased and relieved to meet him rather than the new master of Marchmont; and last, but not least, George Ripley had subjugated him by the exhibition of a very flattering confidence.

'Men are all alike,' thought her ladyship. 'Talk of *our* vanity; it is nothing to theirs! Pleasantness is just George Ripley's stock-in-trade. He used to boast that he could get round anybody. I suppose Ralph is flattering himself now that *he* could exercise a salutary influence over that hopeless *vaurien*; and if once good people take that idea into their heads about bad ones, they become capable of any folly and credulity!'

Lady Margaret was very quick to detect Mr. Dufferin's weakness on this occasion, and was not the more lenient to it because accessibility to the subtle flattery of being confided in and deferred to happened to be her own chief foible. But then, who is lenient to their own faults when they discover them in others? No woman that I have ever met; and very few men.

'Necessity makes us acquainted with strange companions,' she remarked blandly. 'Ralph is right. I do feel astonished to hear of his fraternising with George Ripley.'

Mrs. Dufferin answered her son's letter by return of post.

'MY DARLING RALPH (her reply ran),

'We were *all* unspeakably shocked and grieved to hear of poor Mr. Marchmont's death. The news fell on us like a thunder-clap. How much has happened in *how* short a space of time! A few days ago and our old friend was apparently well and happy, and it was upon poor Averil's

children that we were lavishing our pity. Now, let us hope that *their* troubles are at an end. What an unforeseen piece of good luck for them *all!* Oliver has at all events behaved well to *them*, but I am horrified to hear how little feeling he is showing about his father's death.

'I have written to Lady Lavinia, for whom I feel deeply. It would have made me very unhappy had *you* wished to marry Cosy, and I know how *she* has grieved over this engagement. Sweet and lovely as Cosy is, there are not many mothers who would care to receive her as a daughter-in-law. But if Lady Lavinia is wise, she will try to reconcile herself to the inevitable. And I am sure Cosy is very charming in herself; and nobody can *help* admiring and liking her. Poor darling! I am truly grieved to hear of her illness. Let me know how she is going on. It is not *serious*, I trust.

'Dear Agnes is writing to you. She is full of sympathy, and very sorry to hear of Cosy's suffering. All the same, I am sure

that she has her doubts of Cosy ever making a good *wife* ; although she would not own it for worlds, knowing how fond *you* are of all poor Averil's children.

'Is there nothing *we* can do for the boys, or for Cosy ?'

'Yes, my dear mother,' said Ralph to himself, as he replaced Mrs. Dufferin's epistle in its cover, 'there is one thing you could do for poor Cosy, but it is just the very thing that you will not do ; you could keep silence about her.'







## BOOK V.

### *UNTIL THE DAY DAWN.*

‘Farewell ! ever the bitter asphodel  
Outlives love’s rose.’







## CHAPTER I.

### IN THE SPRING-TIME.

‘Powerlessness is the most powerful irritant.’

JOUBERT.

**I**T was the end of May, but the lilacs and laburnums were still in bloom—for it had been a late spring—and the green turf on the lawn at Elcot Lodge, Kensington, where Cosy was staying, was purple and white and golden with the showers of blossoms poured down upon it from the branches overhead. The beds, too, were gay with purple pansies and blue forget-me-nots; and under the garden wall patches of long bright shining green leaves marked the place where lay

hidden from view the white Naiad-like lily of the valley, 'whom youth makes so fair and passion so pale,' and whose delicate perfume was completely overpowered by the stronger, fresher scent of the golden and brown wall-flowers that grew in profusion all over the place.

Cosy delighted in that little back garden, and in the flowers. They reminded her of Paris, and she could have lain all day long on her couch under the lilac-trees, enveloped in the truly hideous shawls and wraps with which Oliver had presented her, watching the opening buds and listening to the song of the birds. She could have been almost perfectly happy during that time of convalescence but for two drawbacks: the one a memory, and the other a fear. The memory was that of the father whom she should never see on earth again, and from whom she had parted in terror and anger; and the fear was of her approaching marriage.

Sorrow and regret behind her: ennui and sorrow before her; and the active sorrow and regret for the past were more

supportable than the weight and weariness that hung over the future. Sometimes, when Oliver was more than usually oppressive, and bored her to extinction by his talk about Marchmont, she would tell herself that she wished she had died in her fever. But that was only sometimes, and when she was feeling very low. A fine day, or a pleasant chat with her nurse—who was very good company—or a talk with the pretty little boy who lived next door, and who came in to play with her in the garden, would soon revive her drooping spirits, and make her forget Oliver for the time. But the sight of his face or the sound of his voice would at once bring back all her trouble, and seal up the springs of joy with a leaden weight.

She would sometimes ask herself why she found him so much more insupportable now than she had done last year at Ryde. Alas! she knew the reason but too well. Then she had only compared him with her father and her father's companions, or with men like Lord Girton—men whom she

neither loved nor respected. Now she was perpetually comparing him with Ralph.

She had quite ceased to wish that Ralph had never crossed her path again ; to exclaim, as she had done last year, ' If he had never come back, I might in time have grown to care for Oliver.'

No ! come what might, she was glad that she had met Ralph again, glad that she had learnt to love him as she did. Not for worlds would she have returned to the slighter, feebler, shallower life of old :

' For lo ! the hollow old content was vain,  
How shall it live again ?'

The excess of her love had driven out all thought of self, and she could have been almost happy in the hope that life might yet give her some chance of *doing* something for Ralph, of proving in some way her devotion to him, had it not been for the dread of this impending fate—this marriage with Oliver.

He would not release her. He would

not even understand that she desired it. If she said she was sure she could not make him happy, he would reply that he would rather be miserable with her than happy without her. If she told him that she did not care for him as a woman ought to care for the man she married, he would answer the love would come by-and-by—when she became his wife: a prediction that Cosy felt certain would never be fulfilled, just as she felt certain that she should dislike Lady Lavinia, and that she should loathe Marchmont.

No, there was no help for it—no help any way; for Oliver was literally keeping her and her little brothers.

‘And you can’t refuse,’ she said to Ralph, whom she was seeing to-day for the first time since her recovery, ‘to marry a man who has been keeping you for weeks.’ Then, with much bitterness: ‘I’m simply being kept, Ralph.’

Ralph had left town two days after Cosy had been taken ill, and he had only just returned to London with his mother and

the Sheridans. This was his first visit to Elcot Lodge, and after the first greetings had been exchanged, and when he had touched lightly upon Jack's death—an event that he could regard in no other light than that of a release—he began at once to talk to Cosy of Oliver.

He had not expected to find her enthusiastically in love with her *futur*, nor wildly happy at the prospect before her; but he had hoped that gratitude, a sense of duty, and habits of tenderness might have engendered some warmer feeling than that which she now exhibited.

'I suppose it is as she hinted to me in Sydney Street, that she is in love with somebody else,' said Ralph to himself, as he looked into the pale, weary face, that seemed to grow so much paler and wearier whenever she spoke of her approaching marriage.

And then for the moment he did pity Oliver from the very bottom of his heart; pitied him all the more because he was not present to turn pity into irritability, as he

had an unhappy knack of doing. But with all his pity for Oliver, Ralph blamed him too. He had no sympathy with the selfishness that blinded the young fellow to Cosy's entire indifference to him, nor with the unfeeling doggedness that held her to an engagement that was distasteful to her. Yes; he certainly pitied Oliver, but he was losing all respect for him.

'He has not won her; he has bought her,' he said to himself. 'His City training has taught him how to drive a hard bargain, and his total lack of chivalry prevents him from feeling that it is a mean thing to do to a friendless, homeless girl.'

'There is no way out,' said Cosy wearily. 'I suppose I must marry him. Necessity knows no law.'

'And you care for somebody else?'

She turned her face to the wall, and began to trace with the end of her parasol the delicate fretwork pattern cast by the shadow of the overhanging boughs. Ralph should not read her secret in her eyes, she was determined—those wonderful eyes

that were the windows of her soul, and that never lied.

'She has the good grace to be ashamed,' thought Ralph.

'Silence means "Yes,"' he said.

'It is no use talking about it,' she exclaimed abruptly; 'for it is impossible.'

A sudden fear took possession of Ralph's fancy.

'Can it be Ripley?' he thought.

'The sooner an impossible love is stamped out. the better, Cosy,' he said gravely. 'Remember it can be.'

'I don't think that marrying Oliver will help to stamp it out;' and she laughed bitterly. 'But it is his own fault. He will have it so.'

Ralph drew his chair closer to the invalid couch, and began to speak very earnestly.

'Try to dwell on his brighter side, child. Think how good and how kind he is—and how fond of you, and——'

'And the high price he has paid for me,' she interrupted scornfully. 'Oh, I know perfectly well, Ralph, that he is marrying

the whole family, and that he is about the only man in England who would be such a fool. Yes, he is very kind and very good, as you say ; but oh, Ralph, he nearly drives me mad sometimes. Just imagine his buying "Mélusine" last week at the sale of old Craddock's pictures, that he might hide it away in a lumber-room where nobody could see it ! Fancy wishing to hide that picture ! isn't it sinful—wicked ?

'It is very incomprehensible. But why does he wish to do such a thing ?'

'Just because he never heard before of a lady standing to an artist at the artist's request. He *had* heard of a lady sitting for her portrait, and paying for it ; and probably treating the painter as if he were a sweep ! Can't you see the portraits of the Marchmont ladies, in bright, full blue silks, with big brooches, and small locketts ? Can't you, Ralph ?'

'*Can't* I see them ? I *have* seen them, and they have given me many a nightmare. They are just what you describe. You have the clairvoyance of true genius,

Cosy. You will make Marchmont a very different place when you reign there. But do it by degrees, child. Reform. Don't revolutionise. A nature like Oliver's can be led where it can't be driven.'

He spoke cheerfully to comfort her, but he did not believe for one moment that Oliver Marchmont would ever be either driven or led out of his own narrow groove.

'And so that was his objection to "Mélusine," was it?' continued Ralph, after a moment's pause. 'He did not like the idea of your having stood at Lesoeur's request?'

'That, and the presence of the professional models he objected to. Isn't he an idiot, Ralph?'

Yes, Ralph thought that he was, in some respects; but he also thought it inadvisable to admit as much to Cosy; and so, feeling that they were treading on delicate ground, he rose to take leave.

It was high time that he did so, for the sun was beginning to sink, broad and red, behind a bank of violet and gold clouds,

and a chilly feeling was creeping into the air.

‘You ought to be going in now,’ he said, as he held out his hand; ‘but before I leave, won’t you—won’t you tell me *his* name? I’m not good at match-making, but I might be able to help you. If you *can* marry the man you care for, it is far better that you should do so. Better for you, and better for Oliver, in the long-run. And you know that if I can assist you in any way I will. I should feel terribly sorry for Marchmont if you were to throw him over, but I should feel still more sorry for you both if you were to marry and be unhappy.’

‘You can’t help me. Nobody can. I must just bear it. But Oliver makes it none the lighter to bear,’ she added, with a very forced laugh. Then, suddenly, ‘Oh, Ralph, don’t think me a wretch—a monster! But gratitude *is* a heavy burden.’

‘All burdens are heavy, save to those who have not to carry them. But some

day, Cosy, you will know where to go for strength, rest, peace.

“My yoke is light, My chains are all of roses,  
Whose thorns I wore for you.”

‘It’s no good to talk like that to me, Ralph. I have no religion—and I do so dislike Oliver’s.’

‘Yes; it is not attractive. But that is not his fault. It is his misfortune—and a terrible one too—to have been brought up in the gloomy, illogical, inartistic school of ultra-Evangelicalism. Only time and experience, and perhaps sorrow, can show him how unsuited are his views to the needs of life. Good-bye, Cosy.’

‘Good-bye.’

She did not say ‘Come again soon.’ Something seemed to tell her that he would not come again.

‘My mother will call upon you in a day or two, dear — my mother, and Agnes Sheridan, who wishes very much to renew her acquaintance with you. And the week after next you are coming to stay in our hotel, I hear.’

‘Yes.’ ‘For my wedding,’ she tried to add, but the words choked her. Then, withdrawing her hand from his: ‘You are going to marry Agnes Sheridan, are you not?’

She asked the question very quietly, so quietly that she was astonished at her own bravery, and she knew herself to be equal to more than most women in that line.

‘Yes; I hope so. Won’t you wish me joy, Cosy?’

‘I hope you’ll be very happy. But I don’t know that marriage conduces to happiness,’ she added, in a scoffing tone.

‘One of Ripley’s sentiments, I suppose,’ thought Ralph, as he turned to leave her.

And then it seemed to Cosy as if a heavy shadow had suddenly fallen between her and the setting sun, that was now expiring in a flame of red, and gold, and violet, and turquoise-morte green—making daylight dim.



## CHAPTER II.

FROM PILLAR TO POST.

‘ Le conseil manque à l’ame,  
Et le guide au chemin.’

VICTOR HUGO.

**B**EFORE Ralph had quitted Elcot Lodge four-and-twenty hours, Lady Margaret Sheridan had contrived to learn from him the gist of his interview with Miss Urquhart—not by cross-questioning and pumping, but simply by virtue of the eliciting power she exercised over him. He was the soul of honour and discretion, and never wittingly *betrayed* a confidence. But what is the use of being a woman if you can’t find out

without being told ? His future mother-in-law had often learnt through Mr. Dufferin many things concerning which he could have sworn that he had never dropped a hint. Upon this occasion Ralph merely remarked that he did not feel easy about this approaching marriage ; that he did not think the happy pair well suited ; that he feared Oliver was being too precipitate, and, in racing parlance, forcing the running ; and that it would have been better, all things considered, to have deferred the marriage a little ; and then Lady Margaret knew, as well as if Ralph had told her, that Miss Urquhart had been treating him to a scene, and to lamentings o'er her doom.

‘ That girl is a thorough-paced intriguante,’ she said to herself ; ‘ she has caught Oliver Marchmont, and now she would like to entangle Ralph. She is a very dangerous person for a man to have anything to do with.’

‘ Do you remember, Ralph, one evening you spent with us last autumn, when we

were all passing through town?' Lady Margaret asked suddenly.

'Yes—perfectly.'

'Well, then you seemed to think that Miss Urquhart was genuinely attached to Oliver; and if that be the case, surely the sooner the marriage now comes off the better.'

'I did think so then—indeed, I ~~was~~ sure of it; for she had told me so, and Cosy never lies. But *then* is not *now*. "Où sont les neiges d'antan?" you may as well ask. I firmly believe that Cosy *was* fond of Oliver last year at Ryde, but it was not, I feel certain, the love that stands the wear and tear of time and absence.'

'Time and absence! It was not a year ago, Ralph.'

'One might grow very tired of Oliver in a year,' exclaimed Ralph, laughing.'

'*You* might, or *I* might; but I can't respect the girl who has engaged herself to him, caring for him, and then grows tired of him! Your *protégée's* love must have been of very flimsy stuff.'

‘She is Jack Urquhart’s daughter,’ said Ralph, half-contemptuously; ‘but she is also Averil’s child, and I can never forget that,’ he added quickly. And then Lady Margaret with her usual tact dropped the subject, and said nothing more about Miss Urquhart for the moment.

She had no idea that Cosy really cared for Ralph, but she had a strong idea that she was a very unprincipled young person, and capable of bringing any amount of disgrace and trouble upon a man.

‘And all men, even the best—and Ralph is very good—are weak,’ she said to herself, deducing this theory from her own experience of an amiable, affectionate, but very feeble-minded husband.

For once in her life Lady Margaret sympathised with Lady Lavinia Marchmont, and quite entered into her angry refusal to meet or to receive Miss Urquhart.

Mrs. Dufferin, on the contrary, could not understand such conduct. As usual, that good lady’s opinion veered with every

change of companion. Sometimes she sympathised with Cosy, sometimes with Oliver, sometimes with Oliver's mother ; but on one point she was always firm : she could not understand any woman behaving towards an only son with the coldness and harshness that Lady Lavinia was exhibiting towards Oliver.

' I am very sorry for her,' she would say one moment. Then the next, ' But she is a horrid unfeeling woman ; and Cosy is so pretty,' she would add, that consideration influencing the casting vote.

Between them all Ralph was much bored. He began to grow tired of the very sound of Cosy's name. He pitied the girl, but she tried his patience. He was fond of her after a fashion, but he thanked Heaven twenty times a day that the wife of his choice in no way resembled her.

' I shall be so delighted when this Marchmont marriage is over,' Ralph said to Agnes, on the afternoon of the day upon which they were expecting Cosy.

Agnes replied fervently that she too should be very glad. Mrs. Oliver Marchmont would have no claim upon Ralph. Averil Urquhart's orphan daughter had ; and Miss Sheridan disapproved highly of such claims. She belonged to the class who entirely disbelieve in Platonic friendship. Men had always been either in love with her or indifferent to her ; and she could not understand the women who inspired a different kind of feeling. She was wholly wanting in the dramatic power of putting herself in another's place. What had not come within the range of her experience she found it hard to believe in. She had many good qualities, had this gentle, affectionate girl, whom Ralph Dufferin was going to make his wife, but she was thoroughly conventional. She could not bear anything unusual ; and she considered the relations between her future husband and Miss Urquhart to be very unusual. And, moreover, they were undesirable ; they excited her jealousy—that sin she was striving so hard to conquer,

but which she could not overcome ; for it was no more to be got rid of than was Cosy Urquhart's aversion to anything dull and decorous, or Ralph Dufferin's imperturbable coolness and self-complacency. But she fully believed that she should vanquish her failing in time ; for it takes some people a long time to realise the fact that we must one and all of us accept our character, and that at best we can only modify or improve it.

Cosy was to arrive at six, and about ten minutes before that time the waiter came up to ask if Lady Margaret could see a young person from Duke Street, who had called with some patterns ; he had received orders not to admit any visitors.

'Oh yes, you can show her up,' said Lady Margaret ; 'she won't remain long. She will be gone before Miss Urquhart arrives.'

So the young lady with the patterns for altar-cloths was shown up, and under the discussion that followed, Agnes and Ralph retired to the other end of the room for a quiet talk.

‘What is the matter, dear? You look worried,’ said Miss Sheridan, in that tone of jealous anxiety that is so flattering to the engaged, so boring to the married man. ‘Are you still thinking about Cosy Urquhart’s marriage?’

‘I am,’ replied Ralph; ‘and the thought troubles me. She——’

‘Miss Urquhart,’ announced the waiter, flinging open the door; and the next moment Cosy entered, followed by Oliver. Down went the patterns as Mrs. Dufferin rushed forward to greet Averil’s child with much warmth. Ralph and Agnes followed, and were equally kind and cordial, but somewhat more subdued.

Lady Margaret’s salutation was nothing more than polite; but to Cosy it was quite immaterial whether they were glad to receive her or not. She neither saw nor heeded anyone but Ralph, and she was much mistaken if she imagined that her secret was not known. You may keep such a secret from your own familiar friend, from the man you love, from yourself; but

you will never guard it so carefully as to prevent a jealous woman from finding it out.

‘You are going to dine with us, dear, I hope,’ said Mrs. Dufferin, cheerfully.

‘Dine with these women! Pass an evening with them! Dieu merci, non!’ ejaculated Cosy, inwardly and very fervently.

‘It is very good of you to ask me, dear Mrs. Dufferin,’ she replied promptly; ‘but I will not dine with you to-night. I have dined already; and all I want is a cup of coffee, which I shall partake of quietly in my own room. But when *you* have finished your dinner,’ she continued, turning to Ralph, ‘I hope you’ll come up to me; I want to talk with you.’

If it were her desire to make ‘these women’ look and feel uncomfortable, she had attained it. They all turned different shades of red—from rose to crimson—whilst Oliver grew scarlet, and Ralph began to fume inwardly. Little goose! why would she make scenes? he felt quite

angry with her for behaving like this before Lady Margaret, to whom he had so vigorously taken her part. And before Oliver, too, who would now learn to dislike and to feel jealous of him.

‘Will you come, Ralph?’

‘Certainly, if you wish it,’ replied Ralph, gravely.

‘*You* will not desert us, I hope,’ said Mrs. Dufferin, turning to Oliver.

‘You must remain and console me, Mr. Marchmont!’ exclaimed Agnes, trying to speak very cheerfully; an effort that Ralph fully appreciated, and rewarded by a smile that, for the moment, made life Paradise to its recipient.

But Oliver was quite impervious to blandishments or entreaties:

‘I cannot stay,’ he said gruffly; ‘I have to dine at home to-night.’

And then Lady Margaret, remembering what that home was like—that ghastly dining-room with its grey and blue flock paper, and its prints of the members of a bygone Conservative Ministry—pitied the

poor young man who was to dine in it, *tête-à-tête* with the mother who did not speak to him, from the bottom of her heart ; pitied him, and felt disgusted with his bride-elect.

‘ This is what it is to have the courage of one’s opinion,’ thought Ralph. He could not feel very angry with Cosy ; she was looking so lovely ; but he told himself that she was impossible in everyday life, only fitted to be the heroine of a romance. And yet she was destined for the very unromantic position of Oliver Marchmont’s wife !

‘ What an odd world it is ! ’ he said to himself. ‘ All the right people in the wrong places. Why didn’t Oliver fall in love with Emily Fleming ? it was clearly his duty to do so. And why did Ripley marry at twenty that tiresome, excellent woman of whom he tired in a month ? Why did he not wait for Cosy ? he might have been tolerably faithful to her. And why in the name of fortune did *she* go and fall in love with *him* at the very time when

he seemed to have outlived his infatuation for her? He would be such a hopeless man to win back—so thoroughly tired of the woman he had seen enough of!’ thought Ralph Dufferin.

As to himself, he could look on at the game with a spectator’s quiet interest. A deep interest he felt in it, but a wholly impersonal one. He was safe in the haven. He had made a wise choice, and he was perfectly happy. All the same he could feel very sorry for others; but it was the sorrow that has in it that tinge of conscious superiority that is so infinitely consoling to its possessor.

Meanwhile, Cosy had retired to her little sitting-room upstairs—the room that Oliver had hired for her—and was recalling, with a smile, the events of the last ten minutes. The revolution she had effected rather amused her. She had no idea of kow-towing to all those women, she told herself; and as to spending a whole evening with them, she simply could not do it. She had done it once in the dear, dear days of long

ago, when she had hope, and joy, and freedom in her heart. But she could not go through it again. She would not be permitted a second time to carry Ralph off in triumph to a remote corner of the room. It would be Agnes's privilege to do that now. And *she* should have to look on! *Merci!*

‘If I were to go and join that dreary circle to-night I should simply scream with *ennui*,’ she said to herself. ‘Can’t I see how they will all look! Don’t I know what they will wear! Black dresses with square-cut bodies. And the squares will be cut crooked. And Agnes will have a red bow somewhere. That is the style of English girl who’ll live and die in a red bow. No, no! for this evening I mean to be happy, to forget all disagreeables if I can, to have Ralph to myself—for the last time, perhaps.’

She was no self-deceiver, but she could not help clinging to a wild hope, that was almost beginning to take the form of a presentiment, that something might yet intervene to save her from Oliver. But

what that something was to be she had no idea. Madame de Senac would have knelt down and prayed that Ralph might break his plighted vows, and betray his friend, and ask her to elope with him. But Cosy had never fallen into those errors. Indeed, she had always laughed them to scorn. They were in such direct opposition to Ralph's words, 'Always do what you believe to be right ; and never let anyone, upon any consideration, persuade you into doing what you feel to be wrong.'

'Ah ! that was easy advice for him to give,' she thought to-night. 'And very easy advice it would be for people like Agnes Sheridan to follow. But what did they know of a life of temptation like hers ? Temptation ! The only temptation that had ever assailed Agnes (to make an idiot of herself about a man who did not care for her) she had succumbed to. What would she have done in my place ?' Cosy asked herself. 'How would she have behaved during those two long wretched years that followed mamma's death when we were

driven from pillar to post, from Paris to Biarritz, to Monaco, to Frankfort, to Brussels, always in search of the luck that never came ; papa going faster and faster downhill, the boys growing naughtier and naughtier and more and more delicate ? What would she have done ? Why, she would have run off with somebody who did not want her, judging by what she has done during a life throughout which she has had every advantage and every kind of protection.'

'And it is this girl who has had the power to win him when I failed !' That was the thought that was galling Cosy to-night. This girl with her plain face—to Cosy it was a plain face—and her stupid manners, and her bad dressing, had won Ralph Dufferin.

It seemed to Cosy, as she stood at her window gazing on the busy scene below, that she had grown very old lately—very old indeed. Was it really only three years ago since she had spent that evening at the Rivoli—that evening which had been

to her the beginning of a new life? How plainly she could recall every detail of that visit during which her destiny had overtaken her—the night when she went to meet her fate! She could see the Sheridan girls in their pink muslin dresses, and Lady Margaret in brown silk, leaning back in the heavy red velvet fauteuil that stood before the open window. She could see the *garçon* bringing in the syphon, the *limonade gazeuse*, and the dish of *petits fours*, and depositing them on the table near the open window, round which the party had grouped itself. She could recall the ‘I don’t choose to know you,’ looks of the girls, and the curious glances of the elder ladies, and—more distinctly than all—Ralph’s kind, frank, affectionate manner towards herself. A glow of triumph stole over her as she remembered how he had deserted everybody else for her that evening. And then again she recalled with a cold chill her agony of disappointment when he left Paris without even bidding her good-bye. And she had

persuaded herself that *that* was friendship!

Since that May evening three long years had come and gone, bringing with them many a change to Cosy Urquhart. She had more knowledge now, and less joy. She was going to be rich in earthly possessions, but a bankrupt in hope. Hope! that was rapidly passing out of her life! Her wedding chimes would toll its funeral knell.

'In a few weeks' time I shall feel a hundred,' she said to herself, as she closed the window, declaring that June evenings in England were very cold. 'I should think that one would age ten years every day at Marchmont. And I shall have to spend the whole summer there with Oliver.'

She shuddered at the bare idea. Under any circumstances such a prospect would have had but little attraction for her, for she cordially disliked the country; but in her present frame of mind, and with Oliver for her sole companion, the outward calm and quiet would simply oppress her to suffocation.

Her whole life seemed to have gone wrong ; and this unsatisfied passion—this desire that she could not restrain—were now goading her almost to madness.

‘ I cannot spend the summer there with him,’ she cried bitterly, pressing her hot hands over her fevered eyelids ; ‘ I cannot, and I will not.’

And then it would not be this summer only, she reflected, but her whole life ; a life during which she should have nothing to do but to recall the past, to live it over again with all its dreams, hopes, joys, and troubles, and without the joyous spirit that had once made so light of those troubles.

‘ Oh, how I shall hate it all !’ she cried ; ‘ and I shall not be able to pretend that I don’t hate it, because I can’t pretend, and I can’t hide when I am bored. Well, it is his own fault : he will have it so ! He has bought me—he has paid a very long price for me, goodness knows. So I suppose he is quite right not to let me go free. But oh ! is there no way of escape : no way that Ralph would mind my taking ?’



## CHAPTER III.

### STONES FOR BREAD.

‘What shall assuage the unforgotten pain?’

**W**HEN Ralph entered Cosy’s sitting-room at half-past eight, he found her lying on the sofa by the window, looking more like the Cosy of old days than he had deemed it possible that she could ever do again. Her toilette might have contributed somewhat to the change in her appearance, for it was a long time since he had seen her in anything so rich and costly. She was dressed in a pale water-green tea-gown, made of some soft satin-like material, the front of it smothered in lace. On her left

shoulder she wore a bunch of field flowers, fastened to the lace by a large diamond lizard ; and in her hand was a beautiful lace fan.

As she rose to greet her visitor, he noticed that she glanced at herself in the mirror—a very unusual act on her part—and that the contemplation of her appearance seemed to give her great satisfaction. It might well do so, for she had never looked lovelier. Her marvellous eyes were sparkling with joy, and round her lips played the happy smile of old.

‘I am determined to have one more pleasant evening,’ she said, as she extended her hand to Ralph, who had intended to look very cold and stern, but who found it quite impossible to carry out his intention in the presence of such radiant loveliness.

‘You look splendid, Cosy!’ he exclaimed, after a very close and critical survey.

‘And I am splendid!’ she replied, with a touch of the old childlike joy in her tone. ‘Look at this!’—and she touched her lizard: ‘it was Aubrey Littledale’s gift—

wasn't it pretty of him remembering that there was one on Mélusine's shoulder? And look here too!'—and she opened her fan, of the costliest *point d'Alençon*—'Flore de Senac sent it to me.'

Flore de Senac! What a host of unpleasant recollections that name conjured up in Ralph's mind.

'What does Oliver say to your receiving gifts from her?' he asked.

'Say? He doesn't say anything; he hasn't seen it yet. It's no good showing him beautiful things; he doesn't admire them.'

'He won't like your accepting that fan, Cosy.'

'I can't help it. I can't commit a rudeness to please him. Flore sent me her present in Lord Aubrey's parcel, and of course I wrote and thanked her for it; adding, at the same time, that I was not well enough to see her, which was perfectly true then. She is in London, you know.

'No, I did not know it; but I knew that Littledale was, so I might have in-

ferred it. Well, Cosy, you'll have to drop her acquaintance when you are married. Remember that.'

'Bah! Haven't I told you before that I never "drop"?''

'Cosy, have you ever read the Marriage Service?'

'No, and I shall have heard it read once too often the day after to-morrow.'

She was in one of her incorrigible moods, and there was no keeping her in order.

'Do you know,' continued Ralph, speaking very seriously, 'that you are going to take a vow to love, honour, and obey; and that if you cannot give your husband love, you are bound to render him obedience—and fidelity?'

He looked at her very fixedly as he spoke, and her eyes fell beneath his gaze; but he could see two heavy tear-drops glistening like diamonds on her long dark lashes.

'Yes,' he went on, 'fidelity in the spirit as well as the letter of the law is com-

pulsory in a wife. You cannot *love* to order, but you *must* be true. When you are once married you must never, never again see the man for whom you own to caring more than you care for Oliver.'

She started uneasily, and Ralph could see her bosom heaving beneath her loosely-fitting robe.

'You must never voluntarily set eyes on him again, child,' he continued. 'It would be dangerous enough in any case, but with a man like Ripley——'

'Like George?' she interrupted vehemently, turning to look Ralph full in the face. 'What has George got to do with it? Surely you never thought'—she paused for a moment, and turned perfectly crimson; then the colour died away, leaving her paler than before—'you never thought that I cared for *him*?'

'Why, you told me that you cared for some one, and that it was—*impossible*; and so I concluded——'

'And so you concluded that I cared for George Ripley? *You*—Ralph—thought

—that—*I*—cared—for *him*? You! who for the last three years have been the one being on earth for whom I have cared! *Have* cared! I do love you still, as I shall never again love anyone else. When you left me three years ago in Paris, I had but one hope—that we might soon meet again; but one thought—that I might do what would please you, become what you would have me be. If I did not write, as perhaps I might have done, it was because I knew how badly I wrote and spelt, and I thought that my letters would only make you compare me unfavourably with the other girls you knew—with the Sheridans. I was never vain; I was too pretty; I had received too much admiration to rate it very highly: but when I sent you that photograph, I did think with triumph that people would notice it, and that you would hear it praised. You see I was a child then, and I behaved like a child, and I judged like a child. Because you filled my life I imagined that I must hold a prominent place in yours. I did not know then

that I was in love with you. I never gave my feeling for you a name. I saw so much foolish and wrong love around me that I grew to hold the whole thing in scorn and ridicule. It was not until you came to Ryde, after I had had a fortnight of poor Oliver's society, that I learned how, and how much, I cared for you ; and then I knew that the knowledge had come to me too late to save me ; and from that hour to this I have never ceased to love you fondly, faithfully, passionately. Sometimes I have had a foolish hope that I should win you. Yes, that is what I have said to myself: "I may win him some day." I never deceived myself. I never thought that you would try and win me. And I should have won you in time—I know I should—but for *her*. And I *hate* her! And then, every consideration of pride, reticence, reserve, swept away before the overwhelming force of that hopeless love, that fierce jealousy, Cosy seized his hand, and pressing it to her lips, burst into a torrent of tears.

For a minute or two Ralph stood looking at her, feeling absolutely stunned and bewildered. This fierce outburst, for which he had been so entirely unprepared, had literally overwhelmed him. He could not answer. He could scarcely think. He felt as if he had been suddenly told that he had in his sleep shattered a vase of priceless value. He had done inadvertently an injury he could never undo. And he had done it to Averil's child! to the girl for whom he had always felt and avowed such a pitying, patronising, protecting fondness. He recalled his self-complacent thoughts of a few hours ago, and he hated himself for them. He was a tender-hearted man, and he could not bear to cause pain; and he had caused this cruel suffering.

'Cosy, forgive me!' he said gently, kneeling beside the weeping girl. 'Poor child! tell me that you do not hate me!'

'Hate you!' she echoed wearily; 'why should I hate you? I must always love you. I can't help it, if I would. Don't

look at me like that, Ralph, as if you thought my love any special merit—or fault. It is simply part of me, and I can't get rid of it. When I cease to love you, I shall have ceased to live.'

'No, no, dear ; don't say that. It won't be always like this; you will outlive this fancy.'

She looked up at him with unutterable scorn.

'Fancy ! what is love, then ?'

Ralph was silent. How could he answer her ? What words could he speak to still this unquiet love, to soothe this bitter sorrow ? The only comfort that would have been acceptable he was bound in honour not to offer. Between him and Cosy stood not only Oliver but Agnes.

'Would to God that I could help you in any way !' he said. 'I would give my life to do so !'

She looked at him through the tears that seemed only to make those wonderful eyes larger and brighter still.

'There is no help for me—no peace—no hope.'

‘But, child, why did you ever engage yourself to Oliver? I admit that your position was a sad one, but surely some more congenial release might have been found for you. Remember, when I used to counsel you, and give you advice, I was quite in the dark as to the true state of the case. And then why marry now? This, at all events, is your own doing.’

‘My own doing! is it indeed? Was it my own doing that I was carried helpless and senseless out of my father’s house (you had better have left me to die there, Ralph), and that I only returned to life and consciousness to find myself netted, trapped, bound hand and foot? Was that my fault? Could I have refused to marry the man who was literally keeping not only me, but my whole family?—although I do believe that had you been free I should have refused. No, no! from the moment Oliver came into his fortune there was no longer any hope for me. The net was drawn too tightly round me. If I had been well and strong it would have been difficult enough

for me to escape from him (handicapped as I was by the boys ; how was I to support them ?). But ill and helpless it was simply impossible. No, there was no help for it. There was no one to save me !

The leaden despair of her words struck with a chill to Ralph's heart. ' There was no one to save me !'

' Cosy dear !' he said very gently, taking her thin white hands in his, ' you must not suppose that life will always look to you as dark as it does now, or that you will always feel towards me as you are doing to-night—although I trust that you will always care for me a little for auld lang syne, and you may be sure that I shall never cease to love you very dearly—as dearly as I should love a very charming sister if I had one. But the nature of your affection will change. You will learn in time to think of me as an elder brother. For a while you may be unhappy ; the discontent of your life will make you so, I fear ; but it will pass away. We could not live if such sorrows did not diminish with years. And

your fate is not a solitary one, Cosy. There are hundreds of women suffering as you are suffering ; and although you may not think now that that is any comfort, you will find in time that it is so ; for you will learn that your own bitter experience has taught you how to feel for and to comfort them ; and in solacing their sorrows you will soothe your own. Cease to think of yourself, child. Get out of yourself. You can do it, for you have done it. How faithful and kind you have been to your little brothers ! There was never so good a sister seen, I think. Be to others what you have been to them—a friend, a protector, a guardian angel. Show to a selfish world what unselfish love may be.'

' You are talking as if I were a piece of perfection, Ralph.'

' There is no perfection on earth. Spotlessness is for another world. The best we can hope to meet with here is repentance, and the only proof we can give of it is amendment. Ah ! there is much in all our lives that needs that.'

‘But what can I do?’ she asked eagerly.

In the long dark days to come, her one comfort would lie in *doing* something that Ralph had bade her do.

He was silent for a moment. Then he replied :

‘I scarcely know how to answer that question, dear. What you can do must depend so much upon the circumstances of your life. But I know what you can be : a thing of joy to all who look on you. And in God’s world there is a place and a work for everyone : for the beautiful as much as for the useful. Do the work of the flowers, child : of your own favourite heartsease. Fill your mind with tender thoughts—your husband’s home with beauty and sweetness. Make the dark places bright. Heal and soothe. Be kind, gentle, tender, sympathetic. You have many high and good qualities, Cosy : qualities in which too many of your sex are deficient. You have a man’s sense of honour ; and you are brave, and truthful, and upright. Let the light of those quali-

ties shine before men. Don't conceal them beneath a hard or a flippant manner. Don't—because you are unhappy—try to appear either reckless or indifferent. If troubles rend your heart, do not let them embitter it. Cosy, you know what is right as well as anyone—do it !

‘ And is it right for me to marry Oliver ?’ she asked suddenly, turning and facing Ralph.

What was he to reply ? Was he to tell this girl, who loved him so well, that it was right for her to marry the man she did not love ? He knew that whatever he might say, she would be guided by his decision. How then should he decide ? What should he advise ? After all that Oliver had done, and suffered, and dared for Cosy, was he to be thrown over, jilted, at the eleventh hour ?—and upon the advice of one who had not even the excuse of wishing to grasp the prize he was wresting from another's hand ?

For what the world might say to such a proceeding Ralph did not care one straw ;

he was given to moulding, not to following, the opinions of others ; but he did care for what his friend might think and feel. And then, even if Cosy were to give up Oliver, what was to become of her and of her little brothers ? They were simply penniless. And she could not permit the man she had jilted to continue to support her and her family. There seemed to be, as she herself had truly said, 'no escape.' She and Oliver, and he—Ralph—too (in this matter), were just the victims of circumstances, and could not help themselves.

There are seas in which the most skillfully-piloted vessels will split on the rock of the impossible. There are storms that we must be thoroughly heartless or unprincipled to weather. We sometimes find ourselves in a *cul-de-sac* from which there will be no egress on this side of the grave. And then we think (some of us) that we are doing something very clever and infinitely consoling in denying immortality ! God help us !

If there were no resurrection, no ascen-

sion, how could we ever rise again from the depths into which the strokes of Fate and our own mistakes plunge us? If there was no life of the world to come, could we bear the burden of this life another hour? If there were no God to rest upon, no Father's love to fly to, should we dare to face an impending doom?

Ralph's answer came at last, spoken very slowly and deliberately :

'You must not ask me, Cosy, what you should do. Ask Him. He alone can help you in an hour like this. O child! do believe that this trouble is sent you in love and mercy, to lead you from the visible friends who can help you so little, to the Invisible who will be your guide and your stay for ever.'

She was silent for a moment. Then she said very quietly :

'I see that you wish me to marry, and I will do it. But Ralph, there is one thing I want to ask you——'

'Yes, dear?'

‘Don’t give me away. You were to have done so, you know. But I could not bear it now—for *you* to give me to *him*.’

And Ralph could not have borne it either. He was going to marry well and happily—the woman of his choice ; one of whom his heart and judgment alike approved. He had no desire to exchange Agnes for Cosy ; but still Cosy loved him, and for the moment he almost hated Oliver Marchmont, just as he had for weeks past been half-despising him for clinging to his determination to marry a woman who told him that she could never care for him. Ah well ! doubtless he, too, would ere long come in for his share of the suffering to which the unrestrained indulgence of our wishes seems invariably to destine us ; he, too, would have to pay the penalty of his errors in judgment, for which the penalty is often so much heavier than it is for a wilful sin.

‘I’ll ask Littledale to give you away,’ said Ralph, after a moment’s pause. ‘I’ll write to him to-night.’

‘Do,’ she replied quietly.

Then Ralph drew nearer to say ‘Farewell.’

‘Heaven bless and preserve you, dear!’

‘Good-bye, Ralph.’

‘And you may be quite sure that what has passed this evening will remain forever between ourselves. Not a syllable of it shall ever pass my lips. And you will be silent too, Cosy?’

‘You may be very sure of that,’ she said, with a bitter laugh. ‘I can keep my secrets.’

Her favourite speech, that Ralph had so often listened to with pain and annoyance of old!

He turned away with a heavy sigh, wondering perhaps what difference it would have made in her fate if she had not kept one secret so well all these years. Would the knowledge of it have influenced *his* life? No; he thought not.

‘God bless and protect you, Cosy!’ he murmured, drawing her nearer to him.

Then she raised her sweet face, and

their lips met in a long, close kiss—the first she had ever given him since she was a little child—and the last!

Then he turned sorrowfully away, feeling an unconquerable sadness at heart.

Before he could reach the door, Cosy called to him :

‘Ralph.’

He turned back.

‘Yes, dear.’

‘I asked you just now what I was to *do*, and you said, “to forget myself, and to try to live for others.” And I will, Ralph; at least I will try. But what I really want to know is, what I may do for *you*! I want to have some work of which I may say to myself when I am about it, “This is for Ralph: this is not for myself, or for anyone but Ralph.” Ralph, give me something to do—something to learn! Something—anything! Think how utterly without comfort, without hope, my life will be!’

What was he to tell her? To go to church? to read her Bible? to visit the

poor? Was he to advise her to drown her trouble in amusement? to seek oblivion in some absorbing study, in some engrossing pursuit? Was he to cheat her with the old story: that she would soon forget it—get over it?

He might have spoken thus to some women; but this poor child was different to all the women he had ever known: different in her spirit, her bravery, and her tremendous power of self-sacrifice.

He came back to her and took her hands in his as he answered very gently:

‘What can I ask you to do for me, Cosy? I scarcely know. I wish I did. I wish I knew how to give you any comfort. But there is only One who can. Ask Him. Ah! we ought not to faint and despair, as we do, when His love and His sympathy are facts as true as your love for me.’

‘I should not mind any suffering, if it could do you good!’ she cried passionately.

‘Then I will tell you, Cosy, in what way

it may do me good,' replied Ralph. 'When I see you brave and patient, not sitting with your hands folded before you in lazy acquiescence in your fate, nor blindly and violently struggling against it, but simply trying to do your duty, trying to forget yourself, and to make life happier to others, I shall think : what ought not I to be—how humble, how earnest, how good, to deserve the love of such a woman! Will you do this for me, Cosy? Will you *be* this for my sake?'

She raised her eyes, and gave him one look in reply, but she could not trust her voice to speak ; and in another minute he was gone, and Cosy was left alone, plunged into such a depth of passionate sorrow as she would never fathom again in life : pale and dry-eyed with the grief that lies too deep for tears.

Ten minutes later a parcel was placed in Cosy's hands by her new maid Lucy, who informed her that she had met the waiter bringing it upstairs.

The parcel, which had just come from Thornhill's, contained Ralph's wedding-present: a necklace of pansies in amethysts and diamonds. From the centre of the necklet was suspended a large medallion, on which was raised a purple heartsease—a *pensee*—and through the flower were traced in brilliants the words 'À moi.'

Pinned to the pale yellow satin lining of the velvet case was a slip of paper—a note—evidently written in great haste at the jeweller's shop:

'The pansy for tender thoughts. Think sometimes and very tenderly, dear C—, of your old friend and lecturer,

'R. D.'

'Think sometimes and very tenderly'! of whom but Ralph was she ever thinking? And did she ever think of him otherwise than tenderly? The levity, the banality of the words struck her painfully. They seemed so out of place—so heartless. She forgot for the moment that Ralph must have

written that note some hours, perhaps some days, ago ; that he would not write it now, with the added wisdom and experience of that evening. All she was conscious of at that moment was the intensity of her own suffering, and that made her for the time blind, unjust, half mad. She had sacrificed her all for nothing, she told herself ; the bread of her life for these cold stones. The little pansy she had given Ralph three years ago was a living flower : these glittering gems were dead.

‘ Yes,’ she said to herself wearily ; ‘ he is very clever and kind and good. Yes, he is good ; but he is *not* worth this love. Is any man worth it ? And yet I cannot forget him. I cannot cease to love him. It would be tearing my heart out to try. I shall die first !’





## CHAPTER IV.

### LOOKING BACK.

‘N’as-tu rien dans le cœur de m’avoir pris le mien ?’

A. DE MUSSET.

**U**PON leaving Cosy’s room Ralph walked straight out of the house and went to his Club, where he knew that Lord Aubrey Littledale would put in an appearance sooner or later. It was a lovely night, just such a night as the one on which he had parted from ‘poor Averil’s child’ on the steps of the Rivoli three years ago; and as he wended his way towards Piccadilly his thoughts took a retrospective turn. How well he could remember every event of that evening,

from the time when Cosy entered the little salon, creating such a sensation with her fresh radiant loveliness, to the moment when his mother and Lady Margaret began to banter him, and to warn him not to turn the little beauty's head, begging him not to spoil her.

With what superb indifference he had treated their admonitions! how quietly he had set them down, as was his wont (he knew so much better than they did about everything)! How promptly he had assured them that Jack Urquhart's daughter was quite above the weakness of falling in love! Ah, how blind he had been throughout! How often he had ridiculed the men who were always fancying that women were in love with them! *He* had no vanity of this kind. In this respect he was not as other men are. Not as other men are! the Pharisee's boast! How bitterly he reproached himself for it now, and for the suffering that his thoughtlessness had entailed upon the girl for whom he had professed such a pitying condescending liking!

He could remember the mocking, the almost insulted, feeling with which he had listened at Marchmont to his mother's warning to him 'not to fall in love with Cosy Urquhart.' He had replied somewhat contemptuously that he was not likely to fall in love with any woman of whom he might ever have cause to feel ashamed. How the recollection of those words wrung his heart now! He had considered Jack Urquhart's daughter to be beneath him; beautiful, and amusing, and charming, but no fit wife for him.

Beneath him! Good heavens! it seemed to him now that she was far enough above him; above him in honour, constancy, fidelity, patience. How uncomplainingly she had suffered! how bravely she had borne! What were her trifling faults to his coldness, his selfishness, his interestedness? Her failings that he had so often criticised were all forgotten now. They had vanished like motes in the divine light, and he could only remember that she had loved him—that she did love him still

with an excess that had banished all thought of self, with a love that would last throughout time, throughout eternity.

It was a bitter thought that the happiness of Averil's child should be wrecked through him, when he had always flattered himself that he was doing so much to promote her welfare. And, like a man, his regrets and his thoughts were centred in himself. He reproached himself even more than he pitied Cosy. Formerly, he had reserved all his censure for others: for Averil's shortcomings as a mother; for Jack's delinquencies as a husband; for Cosy's levity, recklessness, and indifference to the world's opinion; for Oliver's obstinacy and want of chivalry in forcing this marriage upon a woman who did not care for him; for Lady Lavinia's treatment of her son; for everyone, in short, except himself. From what a height he had surveyed others, he who had done so well and so wisely throughout his own life! Strong in the consciousness of his own rectitude, his pity for those who deviated

from the right line had been so largely mixed with scorn, that it had almost ceased to be compassion.

Upon entering the Club, the first person Ralph met was Mr. Home, who was just leaving it.

‘Ah, Dufferin!’ he cried, ‘you are the very man I wanted to see. Now, can you tell me something? Is it true that you are going to give Cosy Urquhart away?’

‘No.’

‘Ha! ha! ha! I said it wasn’t. I said, “Dufferin will never do that, I’m certain.”’

‘I had every intention of doing it until about half an hour ago, when I suddenly found myself, through unforeseen circumstances, compelled to give up attending the wedding.’

‘Unforeseen circumstances! Ha! ha! The old story! Called away on business, I suppose? Well, *we* are not called away. Ha! ha! We’re all coming to see Cosy turned off. Aren’t we, Cartwright?’ to Major Cartwright who had just come up.

‘Is this a true bill, Dufferin?’ asked the Major. ‘Is Cosy Urquhart really going to be married on Wednesday?’

‘Yes; really and truly.’

‘Because I was calling on Lady Lavinia to-day, and when I asked her if her son were not going to be married this week, she merely replied that she had heard so. Poor woman! I am very sorry for her.’

‘Well, if it comes to that, I’m very sorry for them all,’ said Mr. Home. ‘I’m deucedly sorry for the man who marries Cosy; and I don’t think the prospect of spending your life with that oaf Marchmont is a particularly delightful one;’ and then with another ‘Ha! ha!’ that might have been heard a mile off, Mr. Home departed, and Ralph went in to look for Lord Aubrey. He was not long in finding him, and he at once made known his request.

At first the young diplomat demurred. He did not know Marchmont, and he did not want to know him. But Ralph asked it as a personal favour, and his lordship finally gave in.

‘I wish I were going to hand her over to any other man,’ he said. ‘My young brother, Francis, was at Cambridge with the *futur*, and says that he is odious.’

‘Oh, come! he is not so bad as that!’ replied Ralph; ‘he is dull, and shy, and prejudiced, but nothing worse.’

‘He is particularly unpleasant, I am sure; and she is so singularly the reverse. She has the most charming manner and the sweetest disposition I ever came across. She has been a very much maligned girl, Dufferin.’

‘I think so too,’ replied Ralph.

‘And a very good one, taking all things into consideration,’ continued Lord Aubrey. ‘How well she behaved to those horrible little brothers, always teaching them and mending their ragged clothes! and how patiently she bore up with Jack’s infernal temper and his ill-treatment of her! Ah! there are not many girls with her beauty, and in her position, who would have behaved as well as she has done. I wish she were marrying a nicer fellow. But,

after all, I suppose that one ought to be very glad that she is doing so well for herself. And if it had happened a year ago, I should have been very glad.'

A year ago! Ralph glanced up inquiringly. What did Littledale mean?

'Well,' he went on, 'a year ago, when Jack migrated to Ryde, I took it into my head that poor Cosy was growing so sick of the whole affair that she would bolt with Ripley. Nine girls out of ten would have done it in her place. But she didn't. And now all danger of that is over. Master George has his hands too full for any pranks of that kind. Goodness! what an odd fellow he is! For more than three years he perfectly worshipped Cosy, followed her from place to place, actually consented to be seen about with Jack during the latter part of that worthy's career, that he might be at hand to help Cosy if she needed it, lent Jack money, and paid his debts over and over again, and all for Cosy's sake. And then suddenly, just after that disgraceful trial, he

happens to meet the heroine of it—Miss Flawes—pities *her*, falls in love with her, and—and Cosy is forgotten.'

'He is a scoundrel, I'm afraid,' remarked Ralph; 'although he can be very pleasant.'

'He is not exactly a desirable friend for a lady,' said Lord Aubrey; 'but he was a very good friend to the Urquharts all the same. And no one ever required a friend more sorely than poor Cosy did. Very few people suspected, Dufferin, all that that girl had to put up with. I knew her perhaps better than most did; and—which way are you going? To Parish's? I'll walk as far as the corner of George Street with you. Well, I was saying that I knew more about the Urquhart *ménage* than most people did, and I can assure you that I have seen that girl ready to cut her throat with rage and despair. The insults, the impertinences, she had to put up with during their last year in Paris, used to drive her half wild. I remember dropping in one evening, when they had rooms in the Rue Scribe, and finding her standing by the

fire, with her little fists clenched, and looking as white as a ghost. She had been worried to death by Craddock through the afternoon, and she had just gone out for a turn towards dusk, when some workman returning home with his pipe in his mouth had spat on her; unintentionally of course, but it seemed to have given her quite a shock. I suppose she was feeling nervous and unstrung, and this was the last straw that broke her down. "She had submitted to every conceivable outrage and humiliation in the course of the day," she said; "and now she had been spat upon!" I never shall forget all she let out that evening, poor child! or how sorry I felt for her. I advised her to marry, and get out of it all as quickly as she could. But she had no luck in that way. The men who were ready to marry her she would not look at; and just the one or two to whom I think she might have said "Yes," never suggested asking the Church's sanction to their union. A lady who was a great friend of Cosy's' (Ralph knew perfectly

well to whom he was alluding, and inwardly resented the idea of any friendship) 'told me once that she fancied Cosy was handicapped by some impossible attachment; and I rather fancy now, looking back upon it all, that she must have been: for she was clever enough, and beautiful enough, to do anything she chose—if she chose. Ah! here we are at your door. Are you coming on to the Davenports?'

'Not I—I am going home to bed.'

'I wish I were, for I am dead tired. Good-night, then, and I'll turn up on Wednesday at eleven, sharp. But I shall have to bolt as soon as the service is over, for I have promised to take some ladies to the Grosvenor at twelve: so you'll excuse my attending the breakfast, won't you?'

'Certainly. Many thanks for coming at all.'

And then the two men parted, and Ralph went slowly upstairs to his room, where he lay awake until daybreak, thinking over all that Aubrey Littledale had been telling him, and over that young life that had

been in a great measure lived for and sacrificed to him—Ralph.

He could make no return for such a sacrifice. None! His hands were tied. Honour, duty, inclination, all forbade him to claim the heart that had been freely surrendered to him long ago. He could give nothing but a friend's tranquil affection, a brother's quiet love to the poor girl who had given him her all. 'But why was this apparent waste of love, why were these seemingly useless sacrifices permitted?' he asked himself. Only Eternity could solve the problem; only Eternal Love could answer the question that has gone up from so many an anguish-wrung heart. Why is Love ever in vain, ever dishonoured? Is it because the Love that gives, and not that which receives, is the true emblem of Him who was set at naught and rejected of men, who gave all and received nothing.

Would poor Cosy ever learn the secret that had kept Him tender and forgiving in the midst of sorrow, wrong, and strife?

the secret of a love that nothing could harden or turn to bitterness? the healing, strengthening power of self-sacrifice? She would never learn to *forget*. Ralph knew her too well to believe that. And she would never care for anyone again; an assertion that it is more than foolish to make about most people, but one that might safely be made in regard to Cosy, in whose nature there was but too little softness, whose life had never known but one touch of romance.

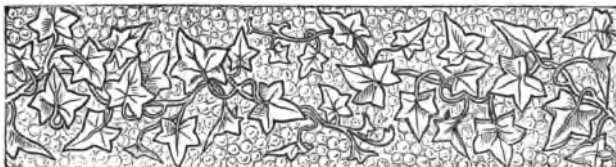
‘What would her future be?’ Ralph wondered, as he lay awake through the livelong hours of that moonlit night, thinking of Averil’s child. ‘Would she nurse her grief, and let it eat into her life until it poisoned it at the very fount? Would she let it consume her? or where would she seek for consolation?’

He had done his best to point out to her where consolation is alone to be found: at the feet of the Great Healer, and in doing His work. But would she have strength and patience to act up to his

counsels ? Recalling their parting interview, Ralph was fain to acknowledge how powerless are mere words, how futile all human efforts to direct some lives : that there are depths in every heart that no mortal hand can sound, heights it cannot reach, wounds that cannot bear the gentlest touch, griefs for which there is no remedy but God and Death. He had done his best to help her ; but he knew how little that best was. He could only leave her to infinite Wisdom and Mercy now.

‘ When all desire at last, and all regret  
Go hand in hand to death, and all is vain ;  
What shall assuage the unforgotten pain  
And teach the unforgetful to forget ?’





## CHAPTER V.

### THE BRIDE'S WEDDING-GARMENT.

'And the burden laid upon me  
Seemed greater than I could bear.'

**C**OSY'S wedding morning dawned soft and fine and clear. The sun flooded the world with light. The birds were singing in the air, that was misty with heat ; the streets were gay with carts and baskets laden with roses, jasmine, heliotrope, and all the other flowers that make the atmosphere faint and heavy with their perfume.

It was the time of roses—the time of year in which Cosy Urquhart had always intended to be married ; just as she had

always intended not to carry the conventional bridal bouquet, but one composed entirely of orange-blossoms, with her monogram in the centre of it in purple and yellow pansies.

That had been one of her fancies ; and the lovely Miss Urquhart had been celebrated for her fancies, and for her passion for the *bizarre*. And she was to have been married in Paris, according to her own programme, in white satin brocade, with a point d'Alençon *jabot* and cuffs, and her dress was to have been fastened with some wonderful old buttons that had belonged to Olympe Mancini—so she was told. She did not know who Olympe was, but that did not signify. And above all, Ralph was to be at the wedding. In what capacity she had not then decided.

That had been the dream. And this was the reality.

She was going to be married in the time of roses. Not in Paris, however, but in smoky London. And Lord Aubrey Little-dale was to give her away. And Ralph

was not to appear on the scene until after the ceremony at breakfast-time. And she was to wear a pale yellow muslin.

‘That! for your wedding-dress!’ Senechale had exclaimed; and Mrs. Dufferin had almost screamed with dismay when she beheld the offending garment.

But Cosy had been quite determined. She would be married in that or her *bège* travelling-dress, she said, and they had to give in. It was quite in vain that Agnes Sheridan had told her on the previous day that it was unlucky for a bride to wear yellow.

‘I am unlucky,’ Cosy had replied quietly; and then Agnes had held her peace.

But when she went downstairs she told her mother that she should be very glad when it was all over: a sentiment that Lady Margaret shared.

She too would be very glad when Captain Urquhart’s daughter was safely wedded to Mr. Marchmont. It would be a safe and a satisfactory termination, as far as she and Agnes were concerned; for the

siren was a dangerous friend for an engaged man. Poor Lady Lavinia was of course to be deeply commiserated. And Oliver could only be regarded in the light of a scapegoat, according to Lady Margaret's views.

The day before the wedding Cosy spent in her own room. She saw Mrs. Dufferin and Agnes for a few minutes, fancying that Ralph would wish her to do so ; but she denied herself to everybody else : and although Oliver called three times, she would not see him, but sent down to say that she had a headache, which was true. But it was an insufficient reason to give for refusing to admit her affianced husband, both Lady Margaret and Mrs. Dufferin, who were sitting in judgment in the drawing-room below, decided.

Neither of these two good ladies could quite make out why Ralph was declining at the last moment to give Cosy away. He had said that he did not want to mix himself up in Oliver's affairs, but they felt very certain that there was some other reason.

‘In the background,’ Mrs. Dufferin said; adding with some warmth that Ralph never told her more than he chose to tell, which was not—all things considered—an unwise precaution.

Meanwhile, poor Cosy was telling herself that she *could* not see Oliver to-day. When she was married to him she would try to make him a good wife. She would try to be everything that Ralph wished her to be. A passionate desire to sacrifice every feeling, every wish of her own, had taken possession of her.

‘But for to-day I must have my own way,’ she said. ‘It is my last day of freedom, and I mean to spend it alone.’

And so to-day she had denied herself to everyone but Mrs. Dufferin and Agnes, who had come up after luncheon to pay their farewell visit, and to prophesy a lovely day for the wedding to the bride-elect, who did not care if it rained fire from heaven.

But it only rained light and glory; and the sun had never shone on a fairer bride than the young lady whom

Lord Aubrey Littledale handed into the brougham which was to drive them across the street to St. George's, Hanover Square.

‘Nor upon an apparently happier one,’ he told Madame de Senac afterwards; adding, ‘I never saw Cosy so radiant. Her proverbial high spirits did not desert her even in the face of so gloomy a prospect as life at Marchmont.’

Certainly her smile had never been brighter, nor her voice clearer and more cheerful than during that short drive. For on one point she was quite determined: that her companion should not discover how wretched she was. She would give him no chance of pitying her to Madame de Senac, no opportunity of wondering if there were any hidden cause for her sorrow. No! having kept her secret so long, she would keep it until the end. And so she entered the church with a smile on her white lips, and a feeling of cold despair gnawing at her heart.

Passing up the aisle, she recognised

many familiar faces. She saw old Home and Madame de Senac, and with them a certain Colonel and Mrs. Westbury, who had known the Urquharts years ago at Nice, and who had come to see Jack's daughter turned off. Flore meant to send a graphic account of the whole proceeding to Écouen, and Mrs. Westbury intended to pass the remainder of the day in paying visits to talk of Cosy Urquhart's wedding.

'Let me see,' she whispered to Madame de Senac, just before the bride entered the church; 'I shall go and see the Duchess, whose Edith looked so particularly hideous on her wedding-day; and the Flemings, whom I detest; and I shall tell them all how lovely the bride looked.'

'Wait and see if she does,' replied Flore, buttoning the twentieth button of her *gant de Suède*.

'Oh! she is sure to do so,' said Colonel Westbury; 'she is always lovely.'

'She is lovely, but no one always *looks* so,' replied Flore, didactically; '*surtout*—no Englishwoman. They have always, all

of them, their days of doing something eccentric in the way of dress. Cosy was the least eccentric person, in that way, that I ever came across ; but still she is English, and she is bound to be eccentric sometimes. I may say all this to you, *ma plus chère*, for you are only half English.'

Mrs. Westbury's mother was an Italian.

'You were quite right,' whispered the only half-English woman to her friend, as Cosy made her appearance on Lord Aubrey's arm.

And then they both drew a long breath of surprise as they turned to gaze upon the unwonted spectacle of a bride in yellow ; not ivory, nor cream, nor *écru*, but plain unmitigated yellow.

Cosy was clad in pale yellow muslin ; and on her shapely little head was a large muslin hat of her own manufacture, trimmed with natural Gloire de Dijon roses. She wore no earrings, no bracelets, no ornaments, save Ralph's necklace.

'Yellow on her wedding-day ! she must be quite mad !' Madame de Senac almost

shrieked aloud in her excitement. 'And amethysts too! *Demi-deuil!* So unlucky! She will soon be a widow. Mark my words.'

'Do you call that unlucky?' chuckled old Home, who had joined the party. 'She wouldn't.'

'No more should I!' exclaimed Mrs. Westbury. 'Widow indeed! I only wish I'd been born a widow.'

And then the service commenced, and the lively quartette had to behave themselves with something like decency until it was over. But no sooner had the clergyman pronounced the words 'And are not afraid with any amazement,' than Madame de Senac sprang up, and elbowing her way through the crowd, reached the vestry almost as soon as the bridal party.

'I must give you the first kiss, *chérie*,' she cried, throwing herself into the arms of Cosy, who, much to the disgust of Mrs. Dufferin and Agnes, did not repulse this undesirable friend, as they had expected her to do.

On the contrary, she returned her embrace very cordially, and introduced both her and Mrs. Westbury to Oliver, who acknowledged their salutations and responded to their sallies in a manner that would have been insolent, had it not been so unmistakably shy.

‘My wife shall never see or speak to either of these women again,’ was the resolution he was forming the whole time he was looking into their pretty little faces with the cream-laid complexions (Mrs. Westbury’s of the ‘Rachel,’ and Flore’s of the ‘Rose’ *teint*), tinted lips, and artificially pencilled eyebrows. ‘Why, they might be asking themselves to Marchmont!’ he thought, growing cold with horror at the bare thought of such a thing.

‘Those ladies are not friends of yours, are they?’ he asked Cosy, during the brief interval occupied by the drive from St. George’s Church to Parish’s Hotel.

He spoke in the stiff half-aggrieved tone that she knew so well and disliked so

much—now that the days of laughing at it were over.

‘One of them is a friend,’ she answered very promptly.

She had no intention of keeping up any intimacy with Flore—Ralph did not wish it, and that was enough—but she resented this early show of interference, this assumption of mastership, and she would have shown her resentment much more clearly and distinctly but for the memory of Ralph’s words, ‘You owe your husband obedience and fidelity if you cannot give him love.’ Ah! for Ralph’s sake she would try to make the best of things! to be brave, and patient, and self-forgetting, as he would have her be. It was something to know that the one she loved best on earth knew what she was suffering and felt for her—that she was not so bitterly alone as she had once fancied herself; and with such consolation she had to rest content.

Flore de Senac would have smiled incredulously at the idea of her—Cosy—meditating passing a life of obedience

and fidelity to this mannerless young cub—whom, of course, she had done quite right to *marry*—but then Flore did not understand the hold that such a love as Cosy's for Ralph could gain upon a life, the loyal allegiance it could win, the fidelity it could ensure. And not merely fidelity to the person, but to the principle laid down by him. 'To be faithful in thought, and word, and deed to the only man I have ever cared for; that is what I mean to be through life,' thought poor Cosy, as for Ralph's sake she refrained from the sharp retort that nearly escaped her when Oliver began at once to look askance at the friends of her youth, and to make disparaging remarks about them.

Fortunately, that drive lasted but two or three minutes, and upon their arrival at the hotel, Cosy found Ralph and Dr. Jameson awaiting them in the drawing-room. The old physician's congratulations and good wishes were most heartfelt and sincere; and upon a hint from Ralph, he abstained from all the jocose allusions he

had intended making upon his own share in bringing about the happy event. He was very fond of recalling to Oliver the fact of its having been at his suggestion, and by his advice, that he had gone to Ryde. 'That lucky prescription of mine!' he used to say, and Cosy had always hitherto smiled and tried to look very much amused at the old gentleman's joke. But to-day Ralph felt certain that she was not up to any effort of that kind.

The wedding breakfast passed off as such a wedding breakfast was likely to pass off. Mrs. Dufferin, Dr. Jameson, and Dr. Jameson's son—who had officiated as Oliver's best man—were the only cheerful people present, and the others were all longing for the trying time to come to an end as quickly as possible. Cosy made a desperate effort to appear happy for Ralph's sake, and failed signally. Agnes made no effort. She said that she was tired, and that she had a headache, and she leant back in her chair, pale and speechless, wondering what might be the nature of

this secret that Cosy had told Ralph the other evening, and why it had deterred him from going to the church that morning. His excuses had not taken her in, and she was now haunted by a dread that some shadow, some secret, had crept between her and Ralph.

‘I have no secrets from him,’ she said to herself, bitterly, ‘but he has one that he keeps from me ; and I know it has something to do with her.’

She had thought that she should feel quite happy and relieved when once Cosy had become Mrs. Marchmont—the siren metamorphosed into a respectable British matron. But she did not feel particularly happy or relieved to-day.

‘I shall be glad when they are both gone,’ she told herself, as she glanced from the bride to the bridegroom, and wondered which of the two looked the more thoroughly wretched.

On his face disappointment and dissatisfaction were stamped in legible characters. At the best of times he was not

clever at concealing his feelings, and to-day they were patent to everyone. When Cosy had told him—as she had done repeatedly during the last month since her father's death—that he had better release her from her engagement, that she did not care for him as a woman should care for the man she married, he had refused to listen to her. He would not release her, he was determined. All the obstinacy in his nature rose in revolt against such an act of chivalrous unselfishness. A worse man might have resigned her. A better man would have done so. Oliver could not, and would not, and did not. He told her that the love would come in time—when they were married. He liked to fancy that there was some magic power in that curiously-worded service to awaken feeling. It was one of the many illusions he had cherished since he had entered into his engagement to marry Jack Urquhart's daughter.

First, he had tried to persuade himself that his father would give in to the engage-

ment in time, although he had never known his father give in to anything that he had once set his face against. Then he had imagined that his mother would surely receive Cosy as soon as she found that the marriage was inevitable. And lastly, he had hoped that as the day drew near, Cosy herself would change in look and manner towards him : and in each instance he had been doomed to bitter disappointment.

Throughout his life Oliver had been ruled by ban and bar ; and because, owing to his shy, joyless, ungenial disposition, he had for many years felt no inclination to swerve from the path in which he had been taught to walk, his mother had flattered herself that he walked therein from principle as well as from choice, and that he preferred her ways to all other ways.

‘ Oliver thinks exactly as we do,’ Lady Lavinia had often said to Lady Fleming when they had been discussing some point—the real truth being that Oliver was

perfectly indifferent, and that he had agreed with his parents from habit ; having contracted that habit in the days when he would have been afraid to differ from them. They had robbed his will and his mind of all hardihood in their dread of exposing him to temptation, and then when the inevitable hour came for his will to clash with theirs, they learnt to their regret and amazement what kind of a nature they had to deal with. The narrowness, the lack of affection and ideality, the obstinacy, that they had approved of when they accorded with their own views, were terrible to contend against. Oliver had always believed—to the despair of his *fiancée*—that the ways of Marchmont were superior to all other ways. Now Marchmont was his, and ‘what is done at Marchmont’ was another way of saying ‘what I do.’ He was as hard and unforgiving to his mother since he had become his own master, as a weak man rendered half desperate by opposition and a sense of past injustice always is to those who have opposed him, and whose

sway he has shaken off. Whether the breach would ever be healed time alone could tell. In her despair, Lady Lavinia had appealed to Ralph to speak to Oliver. But Ralph had declined to interfere.

‘It is Oliver’s affair, not mine,’ he replied coldly. ‘Women are so fond of asking one to speak to somebody—some recalcitrant son, husband, or father,’ he told Lady Margaret afterwards, ‘forgetting that men don’t interfere in each other’s affairs as women do. If I were to remonstrate with Oliver he’d tell me to mind my own business.’

‘But he used to listen to you.’

‘Before he was master of Marchmont—and his own master! in the days when he was in bondage. He’ll never listen to anyone again. His own sweet will will be the law of his life. Injustice in the end produces independence, and the slave becomes a tyrant.’

‘I believe a great deal in the force of habit,’ remarked Lady Margaret. ‘I be-

lieve that some day or other Oliver will be under his mother's thumb again.'

'Then his wife will leave him,' said Ralph coolly, as he rose to go and pay that first and last visit to Elcot Lodge, the details of which we have already learnt.

Throughout the last month Oliver had continued to cherish the illusion that as the wedding-day approached his bride-elect would change in look and manner towards him; that she would dwell less upon her gratitude, and more upon her affection. But that, like all his other delusions, had vanished. Not a single hope had been realised. His father had died unrelenting; his mother continued firm in her determination not to receive his wife; and the merest tyro in such matters might have read in Cosy's face that this was a marriage of necessity, and not of inclination.

'But I don't see what else I could have done,' thought Oliver gloomily, as he looked into the lovely face whose melancholy beauty would haunt him for the rest

of his life. 'I don't see what I could have done. Even if I could have given her up, I couldn't have seen her want.'

For him, too, it seemed as if there had been no escape; and the wedding-ring had had as yet no magic power to dispel the shadows that for months past had been gathering over his life.





## CHAPTER VI.

### THE WAY OF ESCAPE.

‘On dit que sur les cœurs pleins de trouble et d’effroi  
Votre grace s’épanche :  
Soutenez moi, Seigneur—Seigneur, soutenez moi,  
Car je sens que tout penche.’

‘**G**O upstairs and hurry her, Agnes dear. Tell her it is time she was off.’

It was Mrs. Dufferin who spoke, and it was to the bride that she referred.

Cosy had retired to her room a quarter of an hour ago, begging that no one would dream of accompanying her, and adding that she should not be long.

‘I shan’t change my dress,’ she said.  
‘Anything heavier than this would be in-

tolerable to-day ; and there is no good in changing one muslin for another.'

'Won't that light dress look rather conspicuous?' Oliver had murmured uneasily to Lady Margaret, who had shrugged her shoulders and made no reply.

It seemed to her that Captain Urquhart's daughter could never be otherwise than conspicuous. Probably she wished to be so.

'There is nothing very strange in wearing a light muslin on a warm June day, Mr. Marchmont,' said Agnes, striking in to the rescue.

She had a strange desire to defend Cosy against everyone but herself—Agnes. She did not permit anybody whom Ralph protected to be attacked in her hearing without her resenting the liberty.

Ralph could not help smiling at her warmth of manner—the old amused smile that used to offend poor Cosy so deeply, and that seemed to exercise a somewhat similar effect upon Oliver to-day, for he bit his lip, and turned crimson with annoy-

ance. Were this girl and Ralph laughing at him, or pitying him? he relished the one idea as little as the other.

Then Lady Margaret interposed, and began trying to make conversation, chiefly about the weather, and the delight of leaving London for the country in June. But it was uphill work with nobody to support her. The Jamesons had departed, Mrs. Dufferin was tired, and neither Ralph nor Agnes were colloquially inclined: the latter was feeling, as she afterwards told her mother, as if a thunder-storm were gathering overhead. And as to the bridegroom, he did nothing but pace up and down the room, halting alternately before the window and the clock, looking awkward when he was addressed, and gloomy when he was left to himself.

At length Mrs. Dufferin could bear it no longer. The sight of Oliver's face, and the sound of Oliver's voice, and the generally depressing effect of Oliver's manner, had been borne long enough, and so she

turned to Agnes and begged her to go upstairs and hurry Cosy.

Agnes hesitated for a moment, knowing that Cosy did not wish to be hurried ; but then, catching sight of a look on Ralph's face that seemed to say 'Yes, go,' she went, and she had not proceeded far before she heard him following her.

'I pretended I had something to say to you, dear,' he whispered. 'I can't stand much more of that,' and he glanced round in the direction of the drawing-room.

'Thank goodness, it is nearly over,' said Agnes, with a sigh of relief.

'For us,' thought Ralph, 'yes. But for *her* !' and then looking up he saw Lucy, Cosy's new maid, coming downstairs.

'Isn't Mrs. Marchmont ready?' he asked.

'Yes, sir, she is quite ready ; but she isn't very well—she feels so cold. I am going to fetch a cup of tea : she thinks that that may warm her.'

'Cold !' exclaimed Agnes, turning to Ralph ; 'cold, on a day like this ! She

certainly can't be well. Oh, Ralph, let us come to her !'

And then, all pique and jealousy, every meaner, baser feeling forgotten in the pity that is the passion of good, true hearts, Agnes rushed upstairs, closely followed by Ralph.

Before the door of Cosy's room they stopped, and Agnes knocked gently.

Not a sound in reply.

'Try again,' said Ralph.

Again Agnes knocked—and louder this time. Still there was no answer.

'Cosy!' she cried; 'it is I! It is Agnes! Let me in! I want to speak to you! I am not alone! Ralph is with me. We both want to speak to you!'

No reply.

'Perhaps the window is open, and she cannot hear,' said Agnes, lifting a white, frightened face to Ralph.

'If she is within she *must* have heard,' muttered Ralph, hoarsely.

The idea had suddenly taken possession of him that Cosy was not there—that she

had escaped. He recalled her bitter cry the other evening, when she had said that she had been netted—trapped. 'I have drawn the net too tightly over my own head,' she had said; 'and there is no escape.' Had the temptation to flee anywhere away from Oliver, her husband, suddenly presented itself and proved overwhelming?

With a violent effort Ralph forced the door open, and he and Agnes entered the room.

It was empty, but there were unmistakable signs of Cosy's recent presence. On the dressing-table stood her travelling-bag, into which she had evidently been lately stowing away some of the numerous articles that on such occasions are always 'nearly left behind;' for it was half open, and the corner of an old piece of music (a song given her years ago in Paris by Aubrey Littledale) was peeping out. Beside the song lay the text that Agnes had illuminated; a long mousquetaire glove; and a charm—a coral hand that had become detached from Cosy's Florentine ring, that

she always wore as a talisman against the evil-eye.

The glove was quite warm, and the talisman was still wet from a recent washing. But where was Cosy?

‘Oh, Ralph! I do believe she has run away!’ exclaimed Agnes, in a low frightened voice.

‘God help her, then!’ muttered Ralph, turning very pale; and the words had scarcely passed his lips before Agnes gave a low cry of horror, as, seizing his arm, she pointed to the opposite corner of the room, where, from amongst the folds of the heavy crimson curtains that hung round the bed—in the narrow space that stood between the bed and the wall—a patch of pale yellow was to be seen.

In another moment they were both bending over the lifeless form of Cosy Marchmont.

‘She has fainted!’ said Agnes, in a terrified voice. She had never seen anyone in a fainting-fit, and she was rather in terror of such phenomena. ‘But does not

she look peaceful and happy? It seems almost cruel to try to restore her to consciousness.'

Cruel to restore her to the life she had left behind her, to the fate from which there had been no escape on earth! Yes, indeed that would have been cruel; so cruel that her heavenly Father had in His infinite mercy broken her bonds and set her free. There was peace in the grave, a way of escape from all earthly ills through the gate of death. All of sorrow and suffering was over for poor Cosy now; and as Ralph laid her down on the couch from which she should never rise again, he recalled her almost last words to him. Was there nothing she might do for him? no work of which she might say when she was about it, 'This is for Ralph'? Was that question being answered to her now? he wondered. 'Tell me what I am to do!' she had cried, in her exceeding anguish and unrest. Ah, she knew now!

'For knowledge by suffering entereth  
And life is perfected by death.'

‘Try and find Lucy, dear,’ said Ralph, turning to Agnes, who was standing pale and trembling by his side. ‘But do not let anyone else know—yet.’

Then when she had gone, he stooped down and loosened the chain of pansies from the dead girl’s throat (he did not wish *them* to pass into Oliver’s keeping), and drew from her finger the ring that George Ripley had given her, and which he meant to restore to him some day. Perchance the sight of it might recall sometimes to the poor prodigal the one true, pure love his erring life had ever known. It might prove a talisman to preserve him from further wilful sin, an angel’s message to call him back from the far country to a father’s home. There were moods in which Ralph would have found such a hope far fetched, and almost savouring of lunacy, but to-day all things high and merciful seemed possible to him.

Early the following week there was a funeral in Brompton Churchyard, when

Oliver Marchmont's bride was buried, with a cross of purple pansies on her breast. And over her grave they erected a marble cross, on which was inscribed her name, and the date of her death: the hour when the shadows fled away, and the endless morning dawned for Cosy Marchmont.

THE END.







